# THE LIBERAL UNIONIST PARTY UNTIL DECEMBER 1887

by

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I am deeply indebted to the Duke of Devonshire for permission to use the papers of the eighth Duke of Devonshire; to Earl Spencer for permission to use the papers of the fifth Earl Spencer; and to Earl Iddesleigh for permission to use the papers of the first Earl Iddesleigh.

J.K.L.

# C O N T E N T S

## ABBREVIATIONS USED

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| Add. Mss. | Additional Manuscripts, British Museum. |
| Althorp | Fifth Earl Spencer papers, Althorp, Northamptonshire. |
| Cecil | Lady Gwendolen Cecil, Life of Robert Marquess of Salisbury. |
| Chamberlain | Joseph Chamberlain, A political memoir, 1880-92 (edited by C.H.D. Howard). |
| Chats. | Eighth Duke of Devonshire papers, Chatsworth House, Derbyshire. |
| Churchill | W.S.Churchill, Lord Randolph Churchill. |
| Courtney | First Baron and Lady Courtney of Penwith (Leonard and Kate Courtney) papers, London School of Economics. |
| Elliot | A.L.Elliot, The life of George Joachim, first Viscount Goschen, 1831-1907. |
| Gardiner | A.G.Gardiner, The life of Sir William Harcourt. |
| Garvin | J.L.Garvin, The life of Joseph Chamberlain. |
| Gwynn and Tuckwell | S.Gwynn and G.M.Tuckwell, The life of Sir Charles W.Dilke. |
| Holland | B.Holland, The life of Spencer Compton, eighth Duke of Devonshire. |
| Iddesleigh | First Earl Iddesleigh papers, temporarily deposited, Public Record Office. |
| Morley | J.Morley, The life of William Ewart Gladstone. |
| P.R.O. | Public Record Office, London. |
| q.w.o. | quoted with an omission or with omissions. |

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When reference is made to a MSS which has been reproduced or reproduced in part, in one of the works included in the above list of abbreviations, the fact is noted in brackets after the MSS reference. e.g. Add.Mss.4200, f. 15 (Gardiner, I.563-4).

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When an event is equally well reported in several newspapers, including The Times, the Times report is chosen for reference.

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# INTRODUCTION

The years of falling prices, meagreness of profit, and flooded markets began with 1873 and, with two short periods of recovery (1879-82 and 1886-90), continued until 1896. These years are often referred to as the "Great Depression", but it is not altogether a satisfactory term. Industrial output increased, although uneasily and more slowly than in the "good years ".[1] The wages of certain workers fell and there was unemployment,[2] but the fall in prices over the period as a whole was greater than the fall in wages. Thus on the average the peoples' lot improved.[3] But it was a moderate improvement only. Charles Booth after his investigation in London (1887-93) estimated that a little over thirty per cent of the population was more or less poverty stricken,[4] and T.H.Escott considered that Manchester and Liverpool had even more poverty than London.[5]

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1 H.L.Beales, "The 'Great Depression' in industry and trade", Economic History Review, V (1934-35), 65-75.

2 W.W.Rostow, "Investment and the 'Great Depression'", ibid., VIII (1937-38), 136-158; and M. Dessauer-Meinhardt, "Monthly unemployment records, 1854-1892", Economica. New series, VII (1940), 322-6.

3 A.L.Bowley, Wages and income in the United Kingdom since 1860, passim; and G.H.Wood, "Real wages and the standard of comfort since 1850", Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, LXXII (1909), 91-103.

4 C.Booth, Life and labour in London. Poverty Series, II. 21. (Revised ed. 1902).

5 T.H.S.Escott, England, 84.

In one sphere the term "great depression" was fully applicable, and that was in agriculture. The impoverishment of the land owners led to a decline in their political influence, and the Conservatives, as Mr. Ensor has pointed out, were "enabled, indeed compelled . . . to become a town party ".[1] In Ireland the ill equipped small tenant farmers were forced into a hard, and not always successful struggle, to make a living from their holdings. From their poverty came the revolution in Irish land tenure, and for Irish nationalism a driving force such as it had never had before.

These lean years did much to weaken confidence in economic liberalism as the one and only road to the greatest well-being both of the individual and of the community, and stimulated the growth of collectivistic trends. The collectivistic trends had little of the doctrinaire. The democratic spirit was abroad among the electors as never before, and was linked with an expansion of the humanitarian movement unparallelled in the nineteenth century. Collectivistic programmes were first adopted in the municipal politics of the cities. The health, comfort, and prosperity of the citizens were vastly improved and confidence engendered in the suitability of collectivistic remedies for national ills.

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[1] R.C.K.Ensor, "Some political and economic interactions in later Victorian England", Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 4th series. XXXI (1949). 22.

Imperialism was an increasingly important factor in the eighties and nineties, and one which sapped much strength from the home rule cause. It developed slowly from about 1870 until the fall of Khartoum, and then for the remainder of the century expanded with increasing impetus. The feeling that Britain was being outclassed by foreign rivals in the economic and military fields, the industrial and agricultural depression, and the new value placed on colonies by other powers were a few of the complex factors in which it was rooted.

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The Irish home rule movement as distinct from the repeal movement may be considered to have commenced with the formation in 1870 of the Home Government Association of Ireland. Isaac Butt was its chairman and members included Liberals and Conservatives, Roman Catholics and Protestants. Two years later the Ballot Act freed voters from intimidation, an event of special importance in Ireland. In the general election of 1874 home rulers gained fifty-nine seats. (Half of them were landowners[1] and presumably landlords). In Parliament Butt pleaded in a correct and eloquent manner for a provincial Irish parliament but failed to have the matter taken seriously. The result was that a number of Butt's followers broke with his methods and adopted deliberate obstruction of parliamentary business as a policy. Butt resigned the leadership in 1878

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1 Sir J. O'Connor, History of Ireland, 1798 - 1924, II. 36.

and his place was taken by Parnell. In June of the previous year the parliamentary home rule movement and the Irish agrarian movement had been formally linked by the creation of the National Land League. Parnell had accepted the presidentship and four Fenians had been appointed secretaries and treasurers.

The ministry which Gladstone formed in April 1880 planned to govern Ireland by the ordinary law,[1] but increasing lawlessness caused it to abandon that intention. In 1881 it passed a bill which suspended the Habeas Corpus Act and conferred on the Irish executive the power of arbitrary and preventive arrest. Gladstone, Chamberlain, and Bright consented to the measure with especial reluctance. In the same year Gladstone passed a land reform bill which gave the tenants the long demanded "three F's". (Fair rent, fixture of tenure, and free sale of the holding by the tenant). The act surprised contemporaries by its comprehensiveness and proved of much value to the tenants. Nevertheless, the Parnellites ruthlessly attacked it and urged the tenants not to use the provisions for the judicial revision of rents. The Government replied by imprisoning Parnell in Kilmainham Gaol and suppressing the National Land League. Their action was followed by a further increase in crime and disorder in Ireland. Parnell who had welcomed imprisonment for private reasons wished for release a few months later. Negotiations were undertaken by Chamberlain and Gladstone with Parnell, a

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[1] Queen's speech, 20 May 1880, The Times, 21 May 1880, p. 6.

Captain O'Shea being the intermediary. An understanding was reached by which the Government was to pass a bill to relieve Irish tenants weighed down by rent arrears and in return Parnell was to use his influence to maintain law and order. The release of Parnell resulted in the resignation of W.E. Forster, the Irish chief secretary. Gladstone replaced him by Lord Frederick Cavendish. Lord Frederick arrived in Dublin on 6 May and that evening he and the Irish under-secretary, T.H.Burke were assassinated. Great Britain and most of Ireland were horrified. The Government replied by the severe coercion act of 1883. It gave wide powers of arrest, the power to suppress newspapers and to proclaim meetings, and under certain circumstances allowed the right of trial by jury to be restricted, the use of special jurors, and change of venue. The arrears act promised to Parnell was also passed in 1883, but its terms were not sufficiently liberal to allow many tenants to use it.

In October 1884 Chamberlain contacted the Irish Nationalists with the object of bringing about a <u>rapprochement</u> between the Nationalist and the Liberal party on the basis of devolution for Ireland. (O'Shea who was again the intermediary sowed distrust between Chamberlain and Parnell by suppressing certain information). Gladstone gave his support to the proposal and Cardinal Manning secured the provisional assent of the Irish Roman Catholic hierarchy. The outcome was that a scheme for an Irish "central board" with both legislative and administrative functions was laid before the Cabinet on 9 May 1885. The scheme was rejected.

All the peers except Granville opposed it and all the commoners except Hartington supported it.[1] Four days later Dilke resigned on a matter which had arisen out of the defeat of the "central board" scheme and Chamberlain resigned in support of him. The resignations were temporarily suspended, but were still not withdrawn, when on 8 June the Government was defeated by the combined vote of Conservatives and Nationalists.

Salisbury's ministry decided to attempt to rule Ireland by the ordinary law. (The 1883 coercion act expired in August 1885). Placed in power by the Irish Nationalists and with no over-all majority in the Commons, it could scarcely have passed a coercive measure had it wished to do so. The Conservative reversal of Irish policy and the pains which they took to do nothing which might offend the Irish Nationalists made a deep impression. Very many began to wonder whether there was any demand which would not be conceded under the British party system to a determined group in return for a temporary parliamentary support.[2] The attitude of the Government, continued support of it by the Irish Nationalists, and remarks which Salisbury made in two speeches[3] even led some to suspect that the Conservative

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1 Gwynn and Tuckwell, II. 132; Morley, III. 194; and Chamberlain, 149.

2 See below pp. 189-92.

3 At Newport, 7 Oct. 1885, and at the Guildhall, London, 9 Nov. 1885.

leaders were not unfriendly to home rule.[1] On 1 August the Irish viceroy, Carnarvon, with Salisbury's consent,[2] had a secret interview with Parnell at which Parnell's views were asked for and discussed.[3] The Irish tenants were given a very real boon in the Ashbourne Land Purchase Act of this administration.

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Gladstone's adoption of home rule caused six of his lieutenants to oppose him. They were Hartington and Chamberlain - the two most influential Liberals in the country apart from Gladstone - Goschen, James, Trevelyan, and Courtney.

Hartington was widely regarded as the embodiment of honesty and sound judgment and as the man who always placed the national interest first.[4] The Conservative Sir Richard Temple noted that he had seen few politicians so widely and deeply respected.[5] Margot Asquith considered that Hartington

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1 See below p. 190.

2 Sir A. Hardinge, The life of . . . fourth Earl of Carnarvon, 1831-1890, III. 176; and Lady Burghclere [daughter of Carnarvon] to The Times, 28 Nov. 1930.

3 Memorandum drawn up by Carnarvon for Salisbury, 1 Aug. 1885, Sir A. Carnarvon, op. cit., III. 178-81.

4 One observer in December 1885 wrote thus of the attitude of the people of Lancashire, the Rossendale Division of which Hartington represented: "He may be summat back'ard, but we know he means what he says, and performs more than he promises. His character for downright honesty tells." (C.S.Roundell to Spencer, 9 Dec. 1885, Miscellaneous, Althorp).

5 Sir R.Temple, Letters and character sketches from the House of Commons, 66.

had the figure and appearance of an artizan, the brevity of a peasant, the courtesy of a king, and the noisy sense of humour of a Falstaff.[1] The Gladstonian Stuart Rendel described him as emotionless, master of himself in every circumstance, and without a spark of poetry or chivalry - a man who never went out of his way for anyone, and seemingly was without the desire to please.[2] The Conservative, A.A.Daumann, considered him a very shy, proud man with whom one was either on very easy terms or no terms at all.[3] The parliamentary journalist, Sir Henry Lucy, summed up Hartington as a hard working, conscientious, stolid man, somewhat surly in manner, much impressed with the gulf between a marquess and a man to the despite of the latter, and without humour, imagination, or gracefulness of diction.[4]

Hartington gave the impression of indifference and deep boredom.[5] When he was not sprawling on a bench or in an armchair he was leaning against a pillar or a mantlepiece.[6] It was not uncommon for him, especially when in opposition,[7]

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1 Countess of Oxford and Asquith, Autobiography of Margot Asquith, 143.

2 Lord Rendel, Personal papers, conversations with Mr. Gladstone, 1888-98, 35.

3 A.A.Daumann, Persons and politics, 88.

4 Sir H.W.Lucy, Men and manner in parliament, 199.

5 Lord Rendel, loc. cit.

6 E.T.Raymond [pseud. of E.R.Thompson], Portraits of the nineties, 86.

7 Sir A. Mackintosh, Echoes of Big Ben, 14.

to be asleep in his place in the Commons during tedious speeches. He was a man of few words and spoke with a slight drawl.[1] He seems to have had few or no intimate friends and until his marriage, it appears, he entertained little.[2] He rarely wore a greatcoat or gloves and his hands were disfigured by close bitten nails.[3] His speeches were without oratorical distinction and were delivered with his customary air of boredom[4] - a fact which gave life to the myth that he habitually yawned when making them.[5] His voice was unmusical,[6] he hesitated as though deep in thought,[7] and the final words of his sentences could be caught only with difficulty.[8] He barely succeeded in holding the

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1 Lord Rendel, loc. cit.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Sir H.W.Lucy, A diary of the Salisbury parliament, 479.

5 Once when Hartington was introducing an Indian budget he had given a huge yawn and had muttered, "This is damned dull", to A.M.Porter, the Irish Attorney General. (Sir A.Mackintosh, op. cit., 14). This incident was probably the origin of the myth that Hartington habitually yawned during his speeches. The myth in its turn has been the parent of the following anecdote which is still current: Lord Hartington once dreamed that he was making a most important speech in the House of Commons and on waking up discovered that that was exactly what he was doing.

6 Sir H.W.Lucy, loc. cit.

7 H.Hutchinson, Portraits of the eighties, 22.

8 Ibid.

attention of the Commons when making momentous official statements.[1] Out of office he had to address largely empty benches.[2]

Hartington was a slow thinker and had a lethargic temperament.[3] He was noted for his unpunctuality and was sometimes very forgetful. On one occasion he forgot to deliver an important message entrusted to him by the Queen.[4] Many contemporaries credited the report that he was deeply interested only in horse racing and that he took part in politics with reluctance and purely from a strong sense of duty. Viscount Esher, who had been his private secretary (1878-85), reported a different story. He considered that Hartington had no real interest apart from politics and that if cut off from them he would have been as bored as he appeared to be by them.[5] Esher had never known anyone who pondered longer over state problems[6] and he discovered that Hartington insisted upon "accuracy in detail, at first hand, and from original sources ".[7] Hartington was not without chivalry. Esher reported that he rarely allowed any médisance

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1 Sir H.W.Lucy, Men and manner in Parliament, 199.

2 Ibid.

3 Holland, II. 240-1; J.S.Strachey, The adventure of living, 397-8; R.Brett to W.T.Stead, 22 April 1886, Journals and letters of Reginald Viscount Esher, I. 125.

4 Holland, II. 240.

5 R.Brett to W.T.Stead, 22 April 1886.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

of a political or personal foe to pass unchallenged and without some exculpatory or qualifying phrase.[1]

Hartington's over-close friendship with the Duchess of Manchester was a well known, but tolerated scandal. It had begun in the early sixties[2] and lasted until the death of the Duke of Manchester permitted marriage in 1892. The Duchess was strongly Conservative and Hartington was believed to be influenced by her views.[3] Gladstone frequently complained to his family that she influenced Hartington in a Conservative and jingo direction.[4]

Chamberlain was resolved on securing the premiership[5] and had Gladstone not taken up home rule he would almost certainly have secured it. He was ambitious, resolute, tenacious, and abounded in drive and self-confidence. Lady Asquith considered that he owed his position to his contagious belief in himself and his compelling individuality.[6] He was, she maintained, a man who never deceived himself.[7] His

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1 Ibid.

2 Holland, II. 213.

3 Gwynn and Tuckwell, I. 217; and Sir P. Magnus, Gladstone: a biography, 348.

4 Sir P. Magnus, loc. cit.

5 Minute of Sir H.W.Lucy on conversation with Chamberlain, 29 April 1900, Sir H.W.Lucy, Sixty years in the wilderness, 255, and The Balfourian parliament, 190.

6 Sir A.West, Private diaries, 100.

7 Countess of Oxford and Asquith, Autobiography of Margot Asquith, 146.

popularity among the Liberal masses was surpassed only by that of Gladstone.[1] He was especially popular with the Free Churchmen. Not only was he the leading advocate of their views on education and disestablishment, but he was a Unitarian and prided himself[2] on being descended from one of the clergy who had suffered ejection from his living rather than comply with the 1662 Act of Uniformity. In Birmingham audiences greeted him with a greater enthusiasm than they did the veteran John Bright.[3] But Whigs had no love for the man who had expounded the "Unauthorized Programme" and had referred to Hartington as Rip van Winkle[4] and Goschen as the skeleton at the feast.[5] To Conservatives he was an anathema. Lucy has written that Gladstone they distrusted and detested, but Chamberlain they loathed and feared.[6] Had he not suggested that the wealthy should pay "ransom" for the security of their property[7] and

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1 e.g. The British Quarterly Review, 1 April 1886 ( p. 414), noted: "In the country his [Chamberlain's] influence is second only to that of Mr. Gladstone himself ". In certain areas he was much more popular than Gladstone. During the 1885 election campaign Rev. Tuckwell found at many of the Liberal meetings that "if audiences cheered Gladstone's name for two minutes, they cheered Chamberlain's for five." (Reminiscences of a Radical parson, 59).

2 Chamberlain's speech at Denbigh, 20 Oct. 1884, The Times, 21 Oct. 1884, p. 10.

3 Sir A. Mackintosh, Echoes of Big Ben, 14.

4 Speech at Warrington, 8 Sept. 1885, The Times, 9 Sept. 1885, p. 6.

5 Speech at Towbridge, Wiltshire, 14 Oct. 1885, The Times, 15 Oct. 1885, p. 6.

6 Sir H.W.Lucy, Peeps at Parliament, 105.

7 Speech at Birmingham, 5 Jan. 1885, The Times, 6 Jan. 1885, p. 7.

referred to Salisbury as the spokesman of the class who "toil not neither do they spin"?[1] Did his "caucus" not make a travesty of British democracy ?

Gladstone was the greater orator, but in debating ability Chamberlain stood supreme.[2] Lucy noted that Chamberlain had a lightning-like acuteness and a consummate gift of lucid expression.[3] He described his speeches as in the main business talk, pellucid, persuasive, arousing enthusiasm on his own side and lashing his opponents with whips of scorpions.[4] Chamberlain had a vigorous, straightforward phraseology; a clear, musical voice[5]; and a faultless enunciation.[6] The fiercer the attack upon him, the more noisy the interruption, the brighter and cooler he became.[7] Those who interrupted him often received cause to regret their action. Lady Asquith,

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1 Speech at Birmingham, 30 March 1883, The Times, 31 March 1883, p. 10.

2 e.g. "To the end Gladstone remained what he was, even when compared with Mr. Bright in his prime - the finest orator in the House of Commons. In sheer debating power, in the quick give and take of Committee work, he was excelled by Mr. Chamberlain . . ." (Sir H.W.Lucy, Memories of eight parliaments, 23).

3 Sir H.W.Lucy, A diary of the Salisbury parliament, 145.

4 Sir H.W.Lucy, Memories of eight parliaments, 190.

5 e.g. Ibid.; and Lord Frederick Hamilton, The days before yesterday, 211.

6 Sir H.W.Lucy, Memories of eight parliaments, 190; and T.P. O'Connor, Sketches in the House, 243-4.

7 Sir H.W.Lucy, A diary of the Salisbury parliament, 147; and Lord Frederick Hamilton, loc. cit.

who heard him many times, has written that self-mastery was particularly noticeable in Chamberlain's speaking, and that he used such an economy of gesture, movement, and colour that his opponents were snowed under by his accumulated moderation.[1] He hit hard and sometimes with a ruthlessness which makes one wonder whether he fully realized how much his words must have injured. He himself could be very sensitive to other men's phrases. The Pall Mall, it seems, once remarked of him that he was "as touchy as a schoolgirl and as implacable as Juno ".[2]

Chamberlain had wide interests, was an excellent conversationalist, and had a good sense of humour.[3] He was steadfast in his friendships. Morley has recorded that to Chamberlain a friend was not merely a comrade in a campaign, but an innermost element in his existence.[4] In conversation he was "startingly candid and direct ".[5] Garvin referred to the sardonic recklessness of his conversation and explained that to Chamberlain private talk was all relief and play and no guide to his full meaning and much less to his

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1 Countess of Oxford and Asquith, Autobiography of Margot Asquith, 146.

2 Salisbury to Balfour, 29 March 1886, E.E.C.Dugdale, Arthur James Balfour, 79.

3 Viscount Morley, Recollections, I. Bk. II, chap. i, passim.

4 Ibid., I. 209.

5 W.S.Churchill, Great contemporaries, 73.

intended method.[1] Chamberlain was thoroughly loyal to his supporters and drew from them devoted service. One who knew him well has described him as a natural chieftain: "He expected obedience and loyalty . . ., but he felt in every corner of his being that it was the duty of the chieftain to succour, to help, and to advance those who stood by him".[2]

Goschen was the most prominent of the more extreme right wing Liberals. He had been Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in Russell's second ministry, and President of the Poor Law Board and later First Lord of the Admiralty in Gladstone's second ministry. His refusal to reduce the Admiralty estimates had been largely responsible for the dissolution of the government in 1874. He had represented the interests of the British bondholders in 1876 in an investigation of the Egyptian finances.[3] In 1880 he had successfully undertaken a special embassy to the Sultan of Turkey to induce him to carry out certain provisions of the Treaty of Berlin.[4] He had strongly opposed the equalization of the borough and county franchise and on that account could not join the administration formed in 1880.[5] He had refused

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1 Garvin, I. 537.

2 J.S.Strachey, The adventure of living, 383-4.

3 Elliot, I, chap. v, passim.

4 Ibid., chap. VII, passim.

5 Ibid., 196.

the Viceroyship of India in 1880[1] and the Secretaryship for War two years later.[2]

Goschen was the son of a prosperous banker and was of German descent.[3] He had been a member of his father's firm and a director of the Bank of England.[4] He was a recognized financial authority and had written a book of some importance, The theory of the foreign exchanges. Asquith considered that he had a complex, but not a subtle mind.[5] T.P.O'Connor described him as acute, subtle, a dialectician to the finger tips,[6] and perhaps the most destructive critic in the Commons.[7] Men trusted Goschen, but felt no affection for him.[8] He was distant in conversation and sometimes seemed pompous and unsympathetic.[9] He was of a suspicious nature,[10] did not

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1 Ibid.

2 Ibid., 259.

3 Ibid., chap. i, passim.

4 Ibid., chap. ii, passim.

5 Sir A.West, Private diaries, 20.

6 T.P.O'Connor, Sketches in the House, 132.

7 Ibid., 151.

8 A.A.Baumann, The last Victorians, 103-4, and 118.

9 Ibid., 118.

10 Gladstone to Sir A.West in conversation, 10 Jan. 1891, Sir A.West, Private diaries, 19; and Lady Asquith to Sir A. West in conversation, 26 Dec. 1892, ibid., 101.

share blame or distribute praise, and was sensitive to public and private opinion.[1] His speeches were good in substance and form but were marred by the delivery. They were either a torrent or a tempest.[2] His voice was raucous and hoarse, his speaking disjointed, and his manner ungainly.[3] When he consulted notes he held them close to his face because of short sight.[4] He was excitable and easily disconcerted by interjections,[5] but sometimes his retort was crushing.

James, the youngest son of a Hereford surgeon,[6] was another right wing Liberal, but a less militant one than Goschen. He had been made Solicitor-General in September 1873 and two months later Attorney-General. He had been again Attorney-General in Gladstone's second ministry. He had drafted the Corrupt Practices Bill of 1883 and conducted it through the Commons.[7]

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1 Lady Asquith to Sir A. West in conversation, 26 Dec. 1892.

2 A.A.Baumann, op. cit., 115.

3 Kate Courtney's journal, 13 April 1886, Courtney XX; Sir A. West, Private diaries, 171, and 352; Sir H. Lucy, Men and manner in Parliament, 80, and A diary of the Salisbury parliament, 103, and 413; A.A.Baumann, op. cit., 114-15; and Sir A. Mackenzie, Echoes of Big Ben, 27.

4 Sir A.Mackenzie, loc. cit.; and R.Farquharson, In and out of Parliament, 282.

5 A.A.Baumann, op. cit., 115.

6 Lord Askwith, Lord James of Hereford, 14.

7 Ibid., chap. ix, passim.

James was a personal friend of Gladstone and had been given a knighthood by him in 1873 - facts which made him especially reluctant to oppose Gladstone on home rule.[1] He was a good advocate, but not a profound lawyer.[2] His speeches were straightforward, clear, and, as a rule, lengthy. He spoke rapidly in a low voice.[3] Sir Richard Temple described James' speaking as majestic and of a classical excellence, but admitted that sometimes his voice dropped too much for a noisy, restless assembly such as the House of Commons.[4] Lucy, on the other hand, considered that James was nowhere near the front rank of parliamentary debaters or orators.[5] James was staunchly loyal to his party. Once when ill he had been unable "to pair" and had insisted on being taken to the House of Commons and laid on a sofa so that he might vote in an important division.[6] He was exceptionally generous.[7]

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1 Speech by James, 13 May 1886, Hansard, CCCV, cols. 912-13.

2 Sir C.P.Lucas, "Sir Henry James", Dictionary of National Biography. Second supplement. 1901-1911. I. 360.

3 Sir H.W. Lucy, A diary of the Salisbury parliament, 252; and Men and manner in Parliament, 136.

4 Sir R. Temple, Letters and character sketches from the House of Commons, 73.

5 Sir H.W.Lucy, A diary of the Salisbury parliament, 356.

6 Sir A. West, "Lord James of Hereford", Cornhill Magazine, XXXII (1912), 22.

7 Ibid., 23; and J. McCarthy, Reminiscences, II. 240.

When still a young and comparatively poor man he had made over the whole of his savings to the widow of a school friend, who had been left with no means of support.[1] He himself was unmarried.

Trevelyan was the only son of the Sir Charles Trevelyan who had done much for the reform of the civil services in India and Britain. He was a nephew of Lord Macaulay and was much influenced by Macaulay's views.[2] He had written two books of note (Life and letters of Lord Macaulay and Early History of Charles James Fox) and was to write others. He had entered Parliament in 1865 at the age of twenty-seven. He had been a lord of the Admiralty, 1869-70; Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty, 1880-2; Chief Secretary for Ireland, 1882-4; and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, 1884-5. He had accepted the Chief Secretaryship for Ireland following the assassination of Lord Frederick Cavendish and his period of office had been one of unusual difficulty.

Trevelyan was a shy man,[3] seems to have lacked self-confidence, and apparently worried easily. One person who was much in his company for two days during his Irish Chief Secretaryship concluded that he was a pleasant companion of much literary ability and wide reading, but was too excitable,

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1 Sir A. West, op. cit., 23.

2 G.M.Trevelyan, Sir George Otto Trevelyan, 151.

3 Lord Knutsford to G.M.Trevelyan, quoted without date, G.M.Trevelyan, op. cit., 148.

too nervous, and too easily influenced by outward appearance to be a good legislator or administrator.[1] The same person recorded that during a visit to Belfast Trevelyan received telegrams several times in the day informing him that his children, whom he had left in Dublin, were safe.[2] He had a strong voice and was a clear and forcible speaker, but with awkward mannerisms.[3]

Courtney was the eldest son of a bank manager in Penzance.[4] He had left school at thirteen years of age to become a clerk in his father's bank.[5] After almost six years as a clerk he had won a sizarship to St. John's College, Cambridge where he had had a distinguished undergraduate career.[6] He had been called to the bar in 1858, but was drawn into journalism and in 1865 had been appointed a leader writer to The Times.[7] In 1872 he had been given the chair of political economy at University College, London, but had resigned the appointment three years later in order to visit India.[8] His first election to

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1 Lady Cowan (wife of Sir E.P.Cowan, Lord Mayor of Belfast, 1881-2) to T. Macknight, quoted without date, T. Macknight, Ulster as it is, II. 20-1.

2 Ibid.

3 Sir R. Temple, Letters and character sketches from the House of Commons, 447.

4 G.P.Gooch, Life of Lord Courtney, 4.

5 Ibid., 7.

6 Ibid., 20.

7 Ibid., 69-70.

8 Ibid., 106-7.

Parliament was in 1875. He had been Under-Secretary for the Home Department, 1880-1; Under-Secretary for the Colonies, 1881-2; and Financial Secretary to the Treasury, 1882-4. He had resigned from the administration in 1884 because of the Cabinet's refusal to include proportional representation in the franchise reform bill of that year.[1]

Courtney had married Kate Potter, a sister of the Beatrice Potter who was to become famous as Beatrice Webb. He was a Radical and a friend of Morley. Gladstone once unfairly described him as "a confined faddist and lover of paradox, the advocate of womens' franchise, minority votes, bimettalism and the rest ".[2] He was a good parliamentary speaker, vigorous and logical, but did not have the voice and delivery necessary for first rate oratory.[3] He was a little too didactic in his speeches.[4] Lucy referred to his Moses-on-the-mountain attitude and stated that the Commons at first resented it, but eventually came to regard it with amused benevolence.[5]

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1 Ibid., 207-16.

2 Gladstone to Rendel in conversation, 13 Feb. 1896, Lord Rendel, Personal papers, conversations with Mr. Gladstone, 1888-98, 123.

3 Sir R. Temple, op. cit., 169.

4 Ibid.; and Sir H.W.Lucy, Memories of eight parliaments, 240.

5 Sir H.W.Lucy, loc. cit.

# CHAPTER I

## THE LIBERAL LEADERS DIVIDE

In the weeks following the rejection of the Central Board Scheme (9 May 1885) Gladstone's mind developed towards the idea of self-government as advanced by the Irish Nationalists. One can do no more than speculate on which were the factors that consciously or unconsciously influenced him or how far any one factor was responsible. His conversion seems to have been completed by early August[1] although he was still far from formulating a concrete plan.[2] He broached the matter first to Granville and Spencer.[3] Granville admitted that "the Chamberlain Manning Parnell scheme" combined all disadvantages and that he favoured a stronger measure.[4] Spencer's reaction is not recorded. On 7 August Gladstone uncovered the trend of his thoughts to Hartington.[5] Hartington was much alarmed,

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[1] Hartington to Granville, 8 Aug.1885, P.R.O., 30.29.22A (q.w.o., B.Holland, The life of Spencer Compton, eighth Duke of Devonshire, II. 77-78); and Sir T.Dyke Acland to G.Russell, n.d., q.w.o., F.W.Hirst, Early life and letters of John Morley, 263. (The conversation described took place in August and must have been prior to Gladstone's departure for Norway on the 8th).

[2] Gladstone to Granville, 6 Aug. 1885, P.R.O., 30.29.22A (J.Morley, The life of William Ewart Gladstone, III.216).

[3] Granville to Spencer, 14 Aug. 1885, Granville vol.,Althorp.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Hartington to Granville, 8 Aug. 1885.

[1]but assumed that Gladstone would retire from politics rather than destroy party unity by the advocacy of a separate Irish legislature. [2]Next day Gladstone began a three week cruise in Norwegian waters. On his return he said that he was still uncertain whether or not to remain in the leadership. [3]Two factors attracted him to remain and in a short time they prevailed. The immediate one was to prevent the Moderate Liberal-Radical feud from smashing the party and the other was to settle the Irish problem.[4]

As the weeks passed the latter task dominated his imagination more and more. On 11 September he assured Hartington, "Nothing can be more unlikely according to present appearances than any effective or great legislative action for Ireland."[5] A fortnight later he hinted in a letter to Chamberlain that, if Parnell were to be returned with eighty or ninety followers and were to produce a scheme with adequate securities for the unity of the Empire, the first duty of a

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1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 Gladstone to Hartington (draft), 3 Sept. 1885, Add.Mss. 44148 f. 114 (Holland, II. 78-80); and Gladstone to Chamberlain (draft), 9 Sept. 1885, Add.Mss.44126, f.93 (J.Chamberlain, A political memoir, 121-2; and q.v.o., J.L.Garvin, Life of Joseph Chamberlain, II. 92-93).

4 Gladstone to Granville (draft), 5 Oct. 1885, Add.Mss. 44178, f. 229; and Gladstone to Granville, 18 Jan.1886, P.R.O., Chats. 340. 1909 (Holland, II. 112-13 and Morley, III.282-3).

5 Gladstone to Hartington (draft), 11 Sept. 1885, Add.Mss. 44148, f. 136 (Holland, II. 86-88).

new Liberal government would be to accept and to promote it.[1] On 22 October he reported to Granville that he was trying to familiarise his mind with the Irish problem, but, if one can judge from his remark that he believed there was "great advantage in a constructive measure which would be subject to repeal or recall compared with the repeal of the Union," had not advanced far.[2] Nevertheless barely eight weeks later his ideas had crystallized sufficiently to make possible the indiscretion of his son which came to be known as the Hawarden "Kite".

The antagonism between Moderates and Radicals, which had done so much to bring about the collapse of the previous Liberal administration, was now intensified by the determination of the Radicals to make the most of the new franchise.[3] This antagonism in itself might have ensured Gladstone's continuance in the leadership for it was clear that only under him could sufficient unity be retained to give the party a reasonable chance of success in the general election. Hartington himself admitted that he did not believe his

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1 Gladstone to Chamberlain (draft), 26 Sept. 1885, Add.Mss. 44126, f. 107 (q.w.o. Garvin, II. 97-98).

2 Gladstone to Granville, 22 Oct. 1885, P.R.O., 30.29.22A (Holland, II. 89-90).

3 The following remarks which Chamberlain penned during the general election give an indication of the strength of feeling between Radicals and Moderates: "Foljambe is out for which I am devoutly thankful. There goes another Moderate Liberal and Hartington's speech did not help him. I hope E.Cavendish [Hartington's brother] will go too. He is not safe." (Chamberlain to Labouchere, 7 Dec. 1885, A Thorold, The life of Henry Labouchere, 246).

leadership to be possible and added that he had no wish to attempt it.[1] This indispensability of Gladstone both enhanced his influence within the party and reduced the pressure which colleagues could bring to bear upon him. "If we chose to go into direct opposition," Chamberlain remarked to Dilke, "we might smash him, but the game is not worth the candle, I think."[2]

In order to strengthen the unity of the party, and perhaps also his own position, Gladstone endeavoured to obtain statements from his three lieutenants, Hartington, Chamberlain, and Granville, that they wished him to continue in the leadership. Granville alone gave a spontaneous assent.[3] Hartington refused to commit himself. He admitted that if party unity could be secured, it could be done only under Gladstone.[4] "Whether I desire that such unity should be secured," he bluntly informed Gladstone, "must depend on what the party is likely to do, if in a majority after the election."[5] He urged Gladstone to call a meeting of the party leaders to ascertain whether the different sections could

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1 Hartington to Gladstone, 10 Sept. 1885, Add.Mss.44148, f. 131 (Holland, II. 83-85).

2 Chamberlain to Dilke, 20 Sept. 1885, Add.Mss.43876, f.127.

3 Granville to Gladstone, 9 Sept. 1885, Add.Mss.44178, f.187.

4 Hartington to Gladstone, 6 Sept. 1885, Add.Mss.44148, f. 120 (Holland, II. 80-81).

5 Hartington to Gladstone, 10 Sept. 1885, ibid., f. 131 (Holland, II. 83-85).

acquiesce in whatever policy, and especially in whatever Irish policy, he proposed to adopt.[1] Gladstone, however, had little wish to be caught where he would be expected to give definite commitments and resolutely refused such a meeting.[2] Chamberlain, who did not yet know the trend of Gladstone's ideas on Ireland, strove to induce him to commit the party to certain objects. These were, the principle of "free education", the extension of the local government proposals to include parish councils, and local authorities to have power to compel the sale of land for the creation of small holdings, and to have control of local charities and educational endowments.[3]

Parnell, encouraged by his interview of 1 August with Carnarvon, the Irish Viceroy, as well as by the obvious anxiety of the Conservative Government to do nothing which might antagonise him, appears to have assumed that the Conservatives were well on the road to the acceptance of home rule. At any rate he acted as though on that assumption and by his cynical contempt for the opinion of Great Britain did his cause irreparable harm during the remainder of the year. This was especially true of his two Dublin speeches of 24 and 25 August in which he declared that home rule would be granted no matter

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1 Hartington to Gladstone, 6 and 10 Sept. 1885.

2 Gladstone to Hartington (draft), 11 Sept. 1885, Add.Mss. 44148 (Holland, II. 86-88).

3 Chamberlain to Gladstone, 10 and 12 Sept. 1885, Add.Mss. 44126, ff. 95 and 102 (Chamberlain, 122-3 and 126-7, and q.w.o. Garvin, II. 93-94).

whether the government should be Whig or Tory and that it was now "only a question of how much self-government they will be able to cheat us out of."[1] Nothing less would satisfy, he said on that occasion, than an independent legislature, preferably unencumbered by a house of lords, with full power over lands, rents, and education, and with the right to protect industries.[2] Five days after the Dublin speeches Hartington at Waterfoot stated his unqualified opposition and warned Parnell that in the long run his programme would cause the other parties to unite against him.[3] On 8 September Chamberlain, speaking at Warrington, disclosed that, although willing to concede "the greatest measure of local government", he was no less opposed than Hartington to home rule as Parnell had defined it.[4]

During the months when Gladstone was becoming more and more engrossed in home rule he did not conceal from Chamberlain that Ireland was a major interest with him, but he in no way

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1 The Times, 25, and 26 Aug. 1885.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., 31 Aug. 1885, p. 8.

4 Ibid., 9 Sept. 1885, p. 6.

took him into his confidence[1] although it was from the champion of the Central Board Scheme that he could most reasonably expect sympathy for his own ideas. In addition Chamberlain was, after himself, the most popular Liberal in the country and had great influence within the party machine. The main explanation perhaps lay in the strained relations caused by Chamberlain's determination to gain the greatest possible recognition for radicalism. It is understandable that Gladstone should have had an antipathy to the hard bargaining plebeian, who so often treated him more as an ally than as a leader and for whom the welfare of the party as a whole was secondary to the welfare of the Radicals. Besides, Gladstone still harboured the old suspicion that Chamberlain had been responsible for certain cabinet leakages in the previous Liberal ministry and feared to trust him with confidential information.[2] Then, too,

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[1] Gladstone to Chamberlain (drafts): 8 Sept. 1885, Add.Mss. 44126, f. 93 (q.w.o. Garvin, II. 92-93); 26 Sept. 1885 ibid., f. 107 (Chamberlain, 161; and q.w.o. Garvin, II. 97-98), 25 Oct. 1885, ibid., f. 114 (Chamberlain, 131-2; and Garvin, II. 113); 6 Nov. 1885, ibid., f. 118 (q.w.o. Chamberlain, 134). Gladstone to Chamberlain, 22 Sept. 1885, Chamberlain, 130-1 (also Gwynn and Tuckwell, II. 185-6). Chamberlain to Dilke, 7 Oct. 1885, Add.Mss.43876, f. 140 (q.w.o. Garvin, II. 107-8); and 9 Oct. 1885, ibid., f. 142 (Garvin, II. 108). Gladstone to Granville, (letter no. 1), 8 Oct. 1885, P.R.O.30.29.29A (Morley, III. 224-5). Chamberlain to Labouchere, 20 Oct. 1885, A.Thorold, The Life of Henry Labouchere, 239-40. Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 167.

[2] Gladstone to Hartington, 2 Jan. 1886, Chats. 340.1883 (Holland, II. 108-9); and J.L.Hammond, Gladstone and the Irish nation, 483 (Hammond bases his statement on notes by Gladstone in the Gladstone papers. The present writer has been unable to locate these notes and so possibly they are among the reserved memoranda of Gladstone's third Cabinet).

Gladstone, from at least 7 October onwards,[1] believed that Chamberlain and he were in agreement on the essentials of the home rule question and possibly Gladstone assumed that, should he produce a scheme, Chamberlain could be relied on to support it. What Gladstone does not seem to have taken into account was the possibility that Chamberlain and he might hold conflicting views on what would, and what would not, endanger the integrity of the Empire.

Gladstone's failure to take Chamberlain into his confidence was a tactical error. It was made doubly so by another circumstance. From early in October Herbert Gladstone had been corresponding through Labouchere[2] with the Irish Nationalist Healy. He could scarcely have chosen a less suitable intermediary. Labouchere delighted in intrigue and was quite unscrupulous.[3] He was at that time an enthusiastic supporter of Chamberlain and on his own initiative kept Chamberlain informed of the correspondence even to the extent of providing him with copies of some of the more important

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1 Gladstone to Granville, 8 Oct. 1885, P.R.O.30.29.29A (Morley, III. 224-5).

2 Radical M.P. for Northampton, and owner and editor of Truth.

3 "Beware of Labby [Labouchere]", Harcourt warned Chamberlain some weeks later, "He talks to everybody, writes to everybody and betrays everybody" (Harcourt to Chamberlain, 4 Jan. 1886, Chamberlain, 175-6), and Morley once remarked of him, "His powers of amplification and ornamentation are so prodigious that it is hardly safe to let him have two words to build upon". (Morley to Gladstone, 1 Jan. 1887, Add.Mss.44255, f. 171).

letters.[1] Chamberlain, of course, intensely resented what he considered were negotiations conducted behind his back.[2]

The interview with Carnarvon appears to have made Parnell eager to ascertain the extent to which Gladstone would be willing to meet Nationalist aspirations. A few days later Mrs. O'Shea wrote to Gladstone offering to send him a paper on Ireland drafted by Parnell. Gladstone replied that he would look upon such a paper as "one of very great public interest" but made clear that he would not enter into any form of counter-bidding for Parnell's support.[3] Gladstone heard nothing more of the paper until 23 October when Mrs. O'Shea wrote asking for a Liberal seat in Ulster for her husband and added that she had Parnell's paper should he wish to see it.[4] Gladstone replied that he did and received a rough plan whereby Ireland was to be governed by an elected chamber with powers of legislation in all domestic affairs, but with no power to interfere in imperial matters. "The representation of Ireland in the Imperial Parliament might be retained or

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1 Labouchere - Chamberlain correspondence, Oct.-Dec. 1885, A.Thorold, The Life of Henry Labouchere, Chap. XI.

2 Lord Harcourt's journal, 9 Dec. 1885, quoted in A.G. Gardiner, Life of Sir William Harcourt, I.550; Brett to Hartington, 15 Dec. 1885, Journals and letters of Reginald Viscount Esher, I. 118; and Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 166, 167 and 170.

3 Gladstone to Mrs. O'Shea (draft), 8 Aug. 1885, Add.Mss. 44269, f. 225.

4 Mrs. O'Shea to Gladstone, 23 Oct. 1885, ibid., f. 226.

might be given up", the document naively stated. Again Gladstone would in no way commit himself. The subject of the paper, he remarked, could be considered only by the Government of the day, but that all information in regard to it was of great interest to him.[1]

However this is not the whole story of Gladstone's contact with the Nationalists at this period. There still remains the correspondence (conducted through Labouchere) between his son Herbert and T.M.Healy. Herbert Gladstone in his After thirty years stated that,

> Both in letters and in private talks he [Gladstone] had told me that there was no reason why I should not state my own views of his position. . . . It was a definite authorisation, and I took it to mean that he wished his position to be known by those whom it directly concerned. I had accordingly written or spoken freely to Labouchere, Bryce, and many others. . . .[2 & 3]

Herbert Gladstone was perfectly aware that Labouchere was little more than the intermediary through which he was communicating with Healy. Thus it seems clear that he believed his father wished his views to be made known to Healy and

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1 Lord Richard Grosvenor to Mrs. O'Shea (draft in Gladstone's handwriting), [3 ?] Nov. 1885, ibid., f. 236. (Gladstone drafted two replies to Mrs. O'Shea: one from himself (f.234) which was not sent and this one).

2 Viscount Gladstone, After thirty years, 309-10.

3 Labouchere informed Chamberlain that Herbert Gladstone asked him just before the end of the session to endeavour to arrange some form of modus vivendi with the Nationalists (Labouchere to Chamberlain, 18 Oct. 1885, A.Thorold, The life of Henry Labouchere, 297-8) - but then a statement of Labouchere, unless supported by other evidence, has to be treated with great caution.

presumably to the other Irish leaders. Why Gladstone should have done so is a matter on which one can only speculate, but that he did so wish makes him, in a sense, at least part-responsible for the correspondence. However, the question of how far Gladstone was responsible for the contents of any one of Herbert's letters is a different matter. Herbert has stated that he was in daily conversation with Gladstone during that autumn,[1] but nevertheless it is possible that he wrote at least a number of the letters without in any way consulting his father just as later in December he did not consult him before giving the press interview which resulted in the Hawarden "Kite".[2]

On 7 October Healy in a reply to Labouchere suggested that the Nationalists be told what Gladstone was willing to grant so that a compromise could be arranged and pointed out that without an understanding the two parties would "run amuck" with one another in the election.[3] Labouchere passed the letter to Herbert Gladstone remarking that some general basis was required and suggested the Canadian internal constitution. "A few words saying 'my father says' sent privately to Healy would, I am sure, work wonders", he added.[4]

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1 Viscount Gladstone, After thirty years, 306.

2 Ibid., 311.

3 T.M.Healy to Labouchere (copy), 7 Oct. 1885, Add.Mss. 46019, f. 24.

4 Labouchere to H.Gladstone, 10 Oct. 1885, Add.Mss.46019, f. 23.

Herbert took the hint and on the 12th forwarded Labouchere a letter which under the phrase "my own impressions as to my Father's view" indicated Gladstone's attitude more fully than Gladstone had done to any but his more intimate colleagues. He felt sure, ran the letter, that, provided the integrity of the Empire was in no way infringed, there was no limit to the powers which his father was willing to see granted to Ireland for the management of Irish affairs. Further he thought that his father in no way disapproved of the efforts of the Nationalists to have the Conservative party take up their question as that, if it could be done, might be the shortest way to a settlement. "I have however", he stated, "heard him say that unless they wish permanently and unconditionally to sink or swim with the Tories, they had better bring the matter to a speedy upshot". Two other points made were that he doubted if his father would consider the gratuitous launching of a plan - supposing he could see his way to one - the best means of forwarding it at that stage and that he had heard his father say that the protection of the minority would be a difficult problem.[1] Healy replied that he had been speaking with Parnell and that Parnell was confident home rule would be granted no matter which party should win the election. He explained that Parnell's idea was to abolish the Lord Lieutenancy, to fix an imperial contribution based on a ten year average of Irish

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1 H.Gladstone to Labouchere (draft), 12 Oct. 1885, Add.Mss. 46019, f. 26.

contributions minus the cost of ruling Ireland, and to retain the Irish members at Westminster. Healy gave as his own view that the Nationalists would gain most from a Conservative government dependent upon Nationalist support because the Conservatives controlled the House of Lords.[1]

Three days later Herbert Gladstone replied in a long, confused letter.[2] The Nationalists, he urged, ought to come to an agreement - that is if they could - with the Conservatives before the general election as otherwise the Conservatives might be able to refuse, or to avoid, a settlement of home rule and might even be kept in power by a secession of anti-Irish Liberals. Whether a plan could be devised which would meet his father's two fundamental conditions was still unknown, he wrote, but he believed that his father considered the great obstacle to such a plan was not the protection of the Protestants but of the landlords. The remainder of the letter, and perhaps the most significant part, consisted of seven reasons why the Nationalists would be advised to throw in their

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1 T.M.Healy to Labouchere, 15 Oct. 1885, Add.Mss. 46019, f. 33 (q.w.o., A.Thorold, Life of Henry Labouchere, 235-7). No indication is given by Thorold that several omissions have been made in printing the text of this letter. The same is true of a number of other letters in the book - a fact which reduces the value of the ones for which originals are not available for comparison. Also Mr. Howard, who had access to the Chamberlain papers, informs us that for the Labouchere to Chamberlain letters Thorold had to rely on inaccurate copies made by Chamberlain's secretary in 1913. (Chamberlain, footnote, 166).

2 H.Gladstone to Labouchere (draft), 18 Oct. 1885, Add.Mss. 46019, f. 36.

lot with the Liberals in the elections.

Healy seems not to have written again until 10 or 11 November when, if one can rely on Labouchere's transcript, he stated that as far as he could gather from Parnell it was not certain that the Nationalists would go against the Liberals "bald headed, if at all". The request that the Nationalists define their demands seemed to be, he complained, a device for their discomfort and added that should the Liberals gain a majority they would not find the Nationalists unreasonable.[1]

In a speech at Liverpool on 10 November Parnell made a further attempt to induce Gladstone to reveal his intentions by inviting him to draw up a constitution for Ireland.[2] To that Gladstone, when speaking a week later, retorted that he was not a minister and had not the right to assume the functions of a minister.[3] However, possibly this may not have been the whole of Gladstone's answer. On the previous day Herbert had written to the intermediary Labouchere and, one feels, had gone as far as was possible to meet Parnell's impracticable invitation. In the letter the fundamental conditions for the creation of an Irish legislature were

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1 Labouchere to Chamberlain, 12 Nov. 1885, A.Thorold, Life of Henry Labouchere, 241-5.

2 The Times, 11 Nov. 1885, p. 6.

3 Ibid., 18 Nov. 1885, p. 10.

clearly set out;[1] a conference between Liberals and Nationalists suggested, thus emphasising that the wishes of the Nationalists would be a prime consideration; and finally an assurance given that on home rule Cladstone truly meant business.[2]

Herbert's letter fell on barren ground. Parnell, believing that home rule was certain no matter whom the elections should bring to power, held that his immediate task was to place his party in the position which would best enable him to extort the maximum amount of home rule when the time for actual legislation should have come. Hence he decided to endeavour at all costs to ensure that in the new Parliament the Nationalists would continue to hold the balance and thus be able to make or mar governments at will. The danger, he recognised,was lest the Liberals, whose prospects were good, should gain a majority over Conservatives and Nationalists combined. To prevent such an outcome he finally decreed that all possible assistance should be given at the polls to the Conservatives and on 21 November a violent manifesto was issued ordering Irish Nationalists to vote Conservative and not for

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1 These were : 1. the maintenance of the unity and integrity of the Empire, 2. an Irish chamber for Irish affairs, 3. Irish representatives to sit at Westminster for Imperial affairs, 4. the equitable division of Imperial charges by fixed proportions, 5. protection of the minority in Ireland, 6. suspension of the Imperial authority for all civil purposes in Ireland.

2 H.Gladstone to Labouchere (draft), 16 Nov. 1885, Add.Mss. 46019, f. 12.

"the men who coerced Ireland, deluged Egypt with blood, menace religious liberty in the school,[1] the freedom of speech in Parliament, and promise to the country generally a repetition of the crimes and follies of the last Liberal administration".[2] One cannot doubt that in this Parnell made a grave error. Not only did the embittered struggle between Liberals and Nationalists which followed make their co-operation more difficult in the following year, but it increased the number of Liberals publicly committed against a separate Irish legislature.

The election of that autumn was fought in the main on British domestic issues. The campaign of Chamberlain and the Radicals for the programme of reforms which came to be known as the "Unauthorised Programme"[3] held the centre of the stage. Few candidates treated home rule as the urgent question of the moment. Nevertheless, Ireland was not ignored. An examination of the candidates' manifestos and speeches reveals that well over half of the Liberals had something to say on Irish affairs and that about one fifth of them made statements which can be taken as indications that they were willing to contemplate at

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1 For the influence of the Schools Question in transferring Roman Catholic votes to Conservative candidates see Mr. C.H.D. Howard, "Parnell manifesto of 21 November 1885 and the schools question", English Historical Review, LXII. 42.

2 The Times, 23 Nov. 1885, p. 11.

3 The sobriquet "Unauthorised Programme" was coined by Goschen in a speech at Glasgow, 14 Oct. 1885. (The Times, 15 Oct. 1885).

least some form of subordinate Irish legislature. Among the latter were Morley and Childers. Chamberlain went forth with energy pent up since the time of his "ransom" speeches of the early part of the year and in a tour which took him to Inverness and back again he everywhere drew immense crowds and was greeted with wild enthusiasm. His campaign was a triumphal progress which Gladstone himself could scarcely have equalled.

On 17 September Gladstone issued his manifesto for the election. His aim was, he explained to Granville, to provide a statement which would hold through the election and which would avoid conflict with either Hartington's or Chamberlain's followers. [1] In the manifesto he emphasised the importance of an early withdrawal from Egypt and maintained that it would result in Britain being restored to "that admirable position in Europe of perfect independence and salutary influence." In home affairs he put forward local government, the reform of parliamentary procedure and of land transfer, the simplification of registration for voters, and recognised to a certain extent the Radical ideas on taxation. He considered that reform of the House of Lords was not a question of the immediate future, but he referred to it with approval. The House of Lords, he complained, had been predominantly Tory ever since 1832 and was likely to become progressively more so. He did not refer adversely to the disestablishment of the Church of England, but classed it as a question belonging to the dim and distant future.

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1 Gladstone to Granville, 9 Sept. 1885, P.R.O. 30.29.29A.

On "free education" he wrote that he wished to reserve his final judgment, but his remarks upon it were on the whole hostile. He dealt with Ireland at considerable length but in generalisations which gave only the vaguest indication of his views.[1] The result was that very few Liberals saw in them any suggestion that Gladstone was considering a separate Irish parliament.

In spite of the statements on local government and taxation Gladstone's election manifesto fell short of what the Radicals had hoped for and Chamberlain at once wrote informing him that neither he nor Dilke could join an administration formed on the basis of the programme which he had presented.[2] Gladstone protested that his aim was for the election only and that he was not laying down the policy for a new government.[3] Nevertheless, Chamberlain in speeches at the "Old Vic"[4] and at Bradford[5] restated his intention of remaining aloof should

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1 The important paragraph was: "In my opinion, not now for the first time delivered, the limit is clear, within which any desires of Ireland, constitutionally ascertained, may, and beyond which they cannot, receive the assent of Parliament. To maintain the supremacy of the Crown, the unity of the Empire, and all the authority of Parliament necessary for the conservation of that unity, is the first duty of every representative of the people. Subject to this governing principle, every grant to portions of the country of enlarged powers for the management of their own affairs is, in my view, not a source of danger, but a means of averting it, and is in the nature of a new guarantee for increased cohesion, happiness, and strength." (The Times, 19 Sept.1885,p.8.).

2 Chamberlain to Gladstone (copy), 20 Sept. 1885, Add.Mss. 43876, f. 127 (Chamberlain, 129-30).

3 Gladstone to Chamberlain (no draft in Add.Mss.44126), 22 Sept. 1885, Gwynn and Tuckwell, II. 135-6, and Chamberlain, 130-1.

4 The Times, 25 Sept. 1885, p. 6.

5 Ibid., 2 Oct. 1885, p. 7.

the election result in a Liberal government. However, the issue was not fought to a finish for as Chamberlain wrote to Dilke it was better to "work to get a majority and then make our terms if we join the Government."[1] Accordingly he finally reduced his ultimatum for practical purposes to an acceptance of the principle of powers for municipal authorities enabling them to purchase land compulsorily.[2]

The Moderate Liberals, although in some ways less militant than the Radicals, by no means left the field. Hartington, Goschen, and others preached Moderate Liberalism on the platforms, and, behind the scenes, Hartington as well as Chamberlain endeavoured to put pressure upon Gladstone. On 8 November he wrote warning Gladstone that the only possibility of keeping the moderate men in the party lay in his taking a strong and decided line against the Radicals.[3]

The general election resulted in the return of 333 Liberals, 251 Conservatives, and 86 Parnellites.[4] Fair trade, the fear of disestablishment, the Nationalist vote, the memory of Gordon and to a lesser extent of Majuba and Maiwand, and the revulsion of a number of Liberals from the party as a result of

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1 Chamberlain to Dilke, 2[illegible] Sept. 1885, Add.Mss.43876, f. 127.

2 Chamberlain to Gladstone, 26 Sept. 1885, Add.Mss.44126, f. 117 (q.w.o., Garvin, II. 114-15).

3 Hartington to Gladstone, 8 Nov. 1885, Add.Mss. 44148 (Holland, II. 90-91).

4 Including T.P.O'Connor, Scotland Div., Liverpool.

the activity of the Radicals[1] enabled the Conservatives to carry the boroughs, but the newly enfranchised farm workers, responding to the "Unauthorised Programme", saved the day for Liberalism. However, the Liberals did not gain the clear majority which Gladstone had greatly desired[2] and which most other men would have regarded as a necessity for any attempt at a major solution of the Irish problem. In Ireland the new franchise and the Nationalist policy of supporting the Conservatives in the constituencies which they did not themselves contest resulted in the defeat of every Liberal candidate. In the previous election Ulster had returned nine Liberals and the rest of Ireland five. It was noted with apprehension that twenty-two of the Nationalists returned had already been in prison.

Chamberlain reckoned that he had 100 sympathizers in the new House[3] and this figure is supported by the calculation made for Gladstone by his chief whip, Lord Richard Grosvenor.[4] (Lord Richard's figures were : 232 moderate Liberals and 101 radicals). A feature of the election, and one which was to be

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1 Grosvenor wrote to Chamberlain on 30 October, "I tell you frankly that you have frightened over shoals of what I call the 'floating' balance, the men who turn an election." (quoted from Chamberlain papers by Mr. C.H.D.Howard in 'Joseph Chamberlain and the 'Unauthorised Programme'", English Historical Review, LXV. 488).

2 Speech at Edinburgh, 9 Nov. 1885, The Times, 10 Nov. 1885.

3 Labouchere to Herbert Gladstone, 30 Dec. 1885, Add. Mss. 46019, f. 123.

4 Lord R. Grosvenor to Gladstone, 12 Dec. 1885, Add. Mss. 44316, f. 148.

of considerable importance, was the number of members who were returned for the first time. Herbert Gladstone on learning that Churchill reckoned that 200 Hartingtonians and 60 Chamberlainites had been returned commented that probably not a score of members had as yet decided to follow either man.[1] Herbert Gladstone's comment, although an exaggeration, contained a truth. Very many Liberal members and especially the newcomers were in no way attached to any particular group, but tended to look almost entirely to Gladstone for leadership. This was even true of many Radicals. The Scotsman (perhaps over optimistically) doubted if more than thirty would answer a whip from Chamberlain.[2]

The prospect of the early overthrow of the Government, to which the election result pointed, caused strong misgivings among the Liberal leaders. Hartington wrote to Goschen on 6 December that if Gladstone were to adopt a policy of strong hostility to the Government a coalition would be impossible, but he was "not at all sure whether some promise of independent support to the Government, if it discards the Parnellite alliance, would be out of the question".[3] Also few Radicals looked forward to a precarious Liberal administration as that would

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1 H.Gladstone to Labouchere (draft), 7 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 46019, f. 51.

2 Scotsman, 10 Dec. 1885, p. 4.

3 Hartington to Goschen, 6 Dec. 1885, Holland, II. 96.

force them to shelve their struggle for supremacy in order to keep the administration in existence - or rather to avoid being held responsible for its collapse. Dilke in speeches on 9 and 1[illegible] December publicly advocated that the Conservatives should be allowed to continue in office.[1] "It would be monstrous for us to bring in a Palmerstonian Government leaning on Tory support", wrote Chamberlain to Morley. "Better far a Tory Government dependent on our good will".[2] Nevertheless, radical opinion on this question was much less important than might appear. At bottom it rested on wishful thinking for as Chamberlain pointed out to Dilke, "If the Government ask for a vote of confidence we must vote against them".[3]

The second week of December saw a revival of the Herbert Gladstone - Labouchere - Healy communications.[4] Healy pressed for a more detailed statement of Gladstone's home rule proposals[5] but Herbert replied that that was not possible as Parnell might use the information as a lever on the Government and the Government once it should know Gladstone's hand would

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1 The Times, 10 Dec. 1885, p. 8, and 15 Dec. 1885, p. 6.

2 Chamberlain to Morley, 15 Dec. 1885, Garvin, II. 134.

3 Chamberlain to Dilke, 15 Dec. 1885, Add.Mss. 43876, f. 169.

4 A sidelight on the Nationalist reaction to the communications is provided by Justin McCarthy's statement at an interview with Carnarvon that Gladstone was making overtures and was most anxious to deal with home rule. McCarthy added that he distrusted Gladstone's sincerity. (Memorandum by Carnarvon, 13 Dec. 1885, P.R.O., 30.6.67).

5 Labouchere to H.Gladstone, 8 Dec. 1885, Add. Mss. 46019, f. 54.

play its own cards accordingly.[1] Suddenly it was decided that Labouchere should contact Parnell himself. Herbert Gladstone provided him with a letter for Parnell's ear in which he restated the six basic conditions for the creation of an Irish legislature enumerated in his letter of 15 November and added that he believed his father was "anxious to proceed on the first opportunity on the lines indicated by these conditions".[2] Rosebery, who had just been to Hawarden for consultation, was urgently asked to meet Labouchere for a discussion. At the meeting Rosebery insisted on the inexpediency of any attempt at negotiation at that time.[3] Later he explained to Gladstone that he believed certain irresistible natural forces would compel Parnell to side with the Liberals and that negotiations might be fatal to the cause and the party.[4] He also expressed the fear that Labouchere might use the letter supplied to him by Herbert as an authorised statement of Gladstone's plan. "I quite admit", was Rosebery's revealing remark, "that there is a certain guarded wording as regards the source, but the veil is too thin to disguise the inspiration."[5]

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1 H.Gladstone to Labouchere (draft), 9 Dec. 1885, ibid., f.60.

2 H.Gladstone to Labouchere (draft), 10 Dec. 1885, ibid., f. 63; and Labouchere to H.Gladstone, 10 Dec. 1885, ibid., f. 65.

3 Rosebery to Gladstone, 12 Dec. 1885, Add.Mss. 44286, f. 279.

4 Ibid., and Rosebery to Gladstone, 20 Dec. 1885, Add.Mss. 44288, f. 285.

5 Rosebery to Gladstone, 20 Dec. 1885.

As it happened there was no danger of a Labouchere - Parnell meeting for Parnell did not acknowledge Labouchere's approach until the 19th and then simply remarked that he would inform him of his return to London.[1] However, on 10 December Gladstone had a letter from Mrs. O'Shea in which she complained that she had not yet received his views on Parnell's proposed Irish constitution and added that Parnell was to see "Lord C." in a day of two.[2] Gladstone replied that he was glad that Parnell was to see Carnarvon as he was convinced that if possible Parnell should come to an arrangement with the Government - the only source from which a specific plan could properly proceed.[3] Further correspondence ensued with Mrs. O'Shea but Gladstone in letters written on 16, 19 and 24 December declined to alter his attitude.[4]

On 15 December Gladstone, without any previous consultation with his colleagues,[5] made in conversation with Balfour his famous offer to Salisbury of Liberal support should he attempt a settlement of the Irish question. (He committed the offer to writing in a letter to Balfour on 20 December[6]).

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1 Labouchere to Chamberlain, 19 Dec. 1885, A.Thorold, Life of Henry Labouchere, 250-2.

2 Mrs. O'Shea to Gladstone, 10 Dec. 1885, Add.Mss.44269, f. 237.

3 Gladstone to Mrs. O'Shea (draft), 12 Dec. 1885, ibid., f. 241.

4 Gladstone to Mrs. O'Shea (drafts), 16, 19 and 24 Dec. 1885, ibid., ff. 249, 256, and 266.

5 Gladstone to Balfour (draft), 20 Dec. 1885, Add. Mss. 44493, f. 252.

6 Ibid.

In doing so Gladstone undoubtedly acted in an exceptionally high handed manner towards his colleagues. He afterwards informed Granville,[1] Hartington,[2] Spencer,[3] and Rosebery[4] of what he had done, but that did not compensate for the original omission. Gladstone acted under an illusion. He believed that the Conservative leaders were genuinely in favour of some form of home rule. His approach would have had little chance of success under the most favourable of conditions. As it was, the Conservatives had rejected on the previous day a not very dissimilar proposal laid before them by Carnarvon and had resolved that the Conservative party could not tamper in any manner with home rule.[5] Carnarvon's proposal was that a joint committee of both houses should be appointed with the task of examining home rule within the limits of unimpaired authority of the Crown and the maintenance of the rights of minorities and property. Further that if possible it should be ascertained by private negotiation whether any, or all, of the leaders of the opposition would support the Conservatives in this course.[6]

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1 Granville to Gladstone, 27 Dec. 1885, Add.Mss.44178, f. 41.

2 Gladstone to Hartington, 20 Dec. 1885, Chats. 340.1858 (Holland, II. 102-3).

3 Hammond, Gladstone and the Irish nation, 428.

4 Ibid.

5 Salisbury to Queen, 14 Dec. 1885, Letters of Queen Victoria, 2nd Series, III. 711.

6 Memorandum by Carnarvon, 7 Dec. 1885 (printed for use of Cabinet. Printers' date : 11 Dec. 1885). P.R.O. 30.6.127, Ms. 21.

The Cabinet put the worst construction on Gladstone's offer. Lady Gwendolen Cecil informs us that Salisbury thought it an attempt to draw the veil of disinterested patriotism over a contemplated surrender to the Parnellite vote.[1] Churchill considered it as tantamount to an enquiry as to what would be the policy of the Government on home rule.[2] Cranbrook referred to it as Gladstonian, insidious, ambiguous.[3] The result was that the Cabinet, when the matter was brought before it at the meeting on 2 January, decided to reject the approach and to give Gladstone no information.[4]

Towards the end of the second week in December Herbert Gladstone became convinced that Chamberlain and Dilke were taking steps with the purpose of compelling Gladstone to shelve home rule[5] - an event which he believed must result in the retirement of his father from politics.[6] Sir Lyon Playfair (M.P., S.Leeds) wrote to him that he had been told by Dilke that such was their object.[7] Herbert decided to counter

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1 Cecil, III. 280-1.

2 Churchill to Carnarvon, 2 Jan. 1886, P.R.O., 30.6.55, Ms.57.

3 Cranbrook to Carnarvon, 2 Jan. 1886, P.R.O., 30.6.55, Ms.55.

4 Harrowby to Carnarvon, 3 Jan. 1886, P.R.O., 30.6.55, Ms.60; Churchill to Carnarvon, 2 Jan. 1886; and Cranbrook to Carnarvon, 2 Jan. 1886.

5 Viscount Gladstone, After thirty years, 308, and 309.

6 Ibid., 308.

7 Ibid.; and Memoirs and correspondence of Lyon Playfair, 342.

Chamberlain and Dilke by inspiring the independent papers in a home rule direction [1] and on 15 December he had a lengthy interview with the manager and an editor of the National Press Association. [2] Next day the Standard and the evening papers announced that Gladstone had definitely adopted the policy of an Irish legislature and that he contemplated a scheme of which important features would be protection of the minority (perhaps through a system of proportional representation), safeguards for the landlords, Irish representation in Westminster for Imperial affairs and a veto exercised by the Crown on the advice of the Irish ministry. Gladstone, of course, was unable to contradict the announcement flatly. He telegraphed that the statement was not an accurate representation of his views, but was, he presumed, a speculation upon them and was published without his knowledge or authority. On the whole that merely confirmed the impression that the statement was either true or substantially true and that Gladstone, craving for power, had directly inspired it. As a result of that impression the incident came to be known as the Hawarden "kite".

The Times wrote that Gladstone was going to bid for Nationalist support with the offer of an Irish parliament with complete control of Irish affairs. It warned that if such a

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1 Viscount Gladstone, After thirty years, 308-11.

2 Ibid., 312.

parliament were conceded the House of Commons must lose all control over Ireland and would have no hope of ever recovering it except by a sanguinary war. [1]The Standard declared that apparently no price was too high for Gladstone in his passion for office and that anyone who understood his character could have foreseen such an outcome. The Irish question, it continued, had now reached a stage when party predilections must give way before the threat to the integrity of the Empire. [2]The Daily News wrote that nothing less than a legislature with jurisdiction over all purely Irish affairs would be worth establishing. It emphasised the importance of a veto, especially to prevent the imposition of Irish tariffs on English goods, and thought that a royal veto exercised on the advice of a minister responsible to the Imperial Parliament would be best. It raised, but did not answer, the question of Irish representation in Westminster and pointed out that if the police were to be in Irish hands some form of security to prevent them from being used against law and order would have to be devised. [3] The Manchester Guardian agreed that the Irish people should have the settlement of all purely Irish matters but held that that did not make necessary a separate legislative body as it could be fully attained by forming the Irish members into a Grand Committee

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1 The Times, 18 Dec. 1885, p. 9.

2 Standard, 17 Dec. 1885, p. 4.

3 Daily News, 18 Dec. 1885, p. 4.

which would consider all Irish bills before their introduction into the House of Commons. The role of the House of Commons would then be limited to accepting or rejecting Irish bills which had received the approval of the Grand Committee.[1] The Birmingham Daily Post wrote that the idea of Parnell giving guarantees for the protection of the landlords and the minority was much too ludicrous for serious discussion and hinted that even Gladstone might fail to carry the Liberal party in any project of the magnitude indicated in the press announcement.[2] The Scotsman remarked that there could be no settlement of the Irish question which did not include a large measure of home rule and that it believed this was recognised by both Liberals and Conservatives.[3] The Northern Whig refused to believe that Gladstone could contemplate the home rule proposal attributed to him.[4] It expressed confidence that such a proposal would be hopelessly impracticable and most dangerously revolutionary and anarchical.[5] Ulster would not, and ought not, submit to it, it stated.[6] Not until 25 December did its confidence in the essential falsity of the Press Association

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1 Manchester Guardian, 19 Dec. 1885, p. 7.

2 Birmingham Daily Post, 18 Dec. 1885, p. 4.

3 Scotsman, 18 Dec. 1885, p. 4.

4 Northern Whig, 17 Dec. 1885, p. 4, and 18 Dec. 1885, p. 5.

5 Ibid., 18 Dec. 1885, p. 5.

6 Ibid., 17 Dec. 1885, p. 4.

statement evaporate.[1] The Irish Times considered that Gladstone had betrayed the interests of the loyalists as far as he could and that there was not a day to be lost in declaring obstinate resistance to the betrayal.[2] The Free Church Christian World stated that an Irish parliament was impossible, but that it was willing to see home rule given in any form short of a parliament.[3] The Methodist Times emphasised that Ireland would have to retain its full representation in the Imperial Parliament, a division being made between Imperial and British legislation. The relaxation of the Imperial grip, it held, would be a signal for the proclamation of a republic and, in addition, Great Britain had a duty to the loyalist minority.[4] The Baptist Freeman in an article, which, however, may have been written before the press announcement, advocated that Ireland be given the same privileges (including county councils) as England, Wales, and Scotland, but no more.[5] The English Roman Catholic Tablet considered that Ireland might be given any scheme which had proper safeguards, provided that the Irish members were retained in Westminster.[6] It held that home rule ought to be dealt with in the same manner as that

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1 Ibid., 25 Dec. 1885, p. 5.

2 Irish Times, 19 Dec. 1885, p. 5.

3 Christian World, 24 Dec. 1885, p. 931.

4 Methodist Times, 24 Dec. 1885, p. 849.

5 Freeman, 18 Dec. 1885, p. 847.

6 Tablet, 19 Dec. 1885, p. 950.

which had been used to settle redistribution.[1]

The Queen had been distressed by the election results[2] and had taken steps to see if a coalition of Conservatives and Moderate Liberals was possible.[3] The Hawarden "Kite" thoroughly alarmed her, but left her as determined as ever on a coalition.[4] However, realising that she could not have one immediately, she decided that Salisbury must be retained in power with the assistance of the Moderate Liberals.[5] On the 20th she wrote to Goschen appealing to him to gather around him all the Moderate Liberals so that Gladstone might be prevented from overthrowing the Government without being able to form one which would stand or which she could accept.[6] She also communicated a similar appeal through the Marchioness of Ely to W.E.Forster.[7] Letters from Goschen, Hartington and Forster largely reassured her,[8] although without diminishing her determination to have an alliance of "all moderate men" against Gladstone.[9]

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1 Ibid., 26 Dec. 1885, p. 997.

2 Queen to Salisbury, 3 Dec. 1885, Letters of Queen Victoria, 2nd Series, vol. III. 206.

3 Queen's correspondence and diary, Dec. 1885, ibid., Chap.VII.

4 Gardiner, I. 552.

5 Queen to Goschen, 20 Dec. 1885, Letters of Queen Victoria, 2nd Series, III. 712-14; Marchioness of Ely to W.E.Forster, 22 Dec. 1885, ibid., 714; and Queen to Sir H.Ponsonby, 19 Dec. 1885, A.Ponsonby, Henry Ponsonby, 201.

6 Queen to Goschen, 20 Dec. 1885.

7 Marchioness of Ely to W.E.Forster, 22 Dec. 1885.

8 Queen to Goschen, 29 Dec. 1885, Letters of Queen Victoria, 2nd Series, III. 717-18.

9 Ibid.

The Queen had an exceptionally high opinion of Goschen and although he had but a small handful of followers and a limited influence, she assumed that he could accomplish much. At this time she gave him advice which no one can say that he did not act upon during the following months. "You must keep Lord Hartington up to the mark," she wrote, "and not let him slide back (as so often before) into following Mr. Gladstone and trying to keep the party together".[1]

Prior to the Hawarden "kite" Hartington knew, not from Gladstone, but from Granville, Spencer, and Northbrook that Gladstone was still much occupied with self-government for Ireland.[2] On 15 December Gladstone wrote to him that "the urgency and bigness of the Irish question was opening to men's minds from day to day" and enclosed a letter from Jenkinson, the head of the Irish Criminal Investigation Department, advocating the cause of self-government.[3] Hartington was uneasy and next day asked Gladstone for his "views and intentions on the Irish question as developed by the general election" and referred to rumours that Gladstone was preparing plans and was in communication with Parnell - rumours which "are so numerous and persistent that it is

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1 Ibid.

2 Hartington to Gladstone, 16 Dec. 1885, Add. Mss. 44148, f. 163 (q.w.o., Holland, II. 97-8); and Northbrook to Spencer, 16 Dec. 1885, Miscellaneous, Althorp.

3 Gladstone to Hartington, 15 Dec. 1885, Chats. 340. 1850.

difficult to believe that they are entirely without foundation".[1] On the following morning the Hawarden "Kite" appeared.[2] Hartington was alarmed and feared that Gladstone would utterly smash up the party.[3] That same day Gladstone answered the request for his "views and intentions".

> The truth is, he wrote, I have more or less of opinions and ideas, but no intentions or negotiations . . .
>
> I consider that Ireland has now spoken; and that an effort ought to be made by the Government without delay to meet her demands for the management by an Irish legislative body of Irish, as distinct from Imperial affairs. . . .
>
> There is first a postulate - that the state of Ireland shall be such as to warrant it.
>
> The conditions of an admissible plan, I think are:-
>
> 1. Union of the Empire and due supremacy of Parliament.
>
> 2. Protection for the minority - a difficult matter . . .
>
> 3. Fair allocation of Imperial charges. . . .
>
> 4. As to intentions, I am determined to have none at present - to leave space to the Government - I should wish to encourage them if I properly could - above all on no account to say or do anything which would enable the Nationalists to establish rival bidding between us . . .

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1 Hartington to Gladstone, 16 Dec. 1885.

2 Hartington to Gladstone, 16 Dec. 1885, Add. Mss. 44148, f. 177 (Holland, II. 101-2).

3 Hartington to Granville, 17 Dec. 1885, P.R.O., 30.29.22A. (Holland, II. 98-9 [In Holland the word "only" has been accidently omitted in the sentence "The latter [Harcourt] is in the depths of despair; not only about Ireland, but about the prospects of the party"]).

> My earnest recommendation to everybody is not to commit himself. Upon this rule, under whatever pressure, I shall act as long as I can . . . . [1]

Hartington replied that since Gladstone's views on the Irish question had become known it was difficult for those unable to share those views to take his advice not to commit themselves.[2]

Goschen, when he saw the National Press Agency statement, wrote to Hartington suggesting that they meet and discuss the situation.[3] Hartington, although he did not suppose that they could take any action,[4] readily acceded and went to London on the 19th.[5] With Goschen's assistance he there wrote a letter to the chairman of his electoral committee in which he stated that the views he had expressed on Irish self-government during the election remained unaltered. Granville tried to dissuade Hartington from publishing it,[6] but without success and the letter appeared in the press two days later. It was the first important move in public to counter Gladstone and led Chamberlain to doubt if Gladstone would go further with his Irish ideas.[7]

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1 Gladstone to Hartington, 17 Dec. 1885, Chats. 34 . 1853 (Holland, II. 99-101).

2 Hartington to Gladstone, 18 Dec. 1885.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Goschen to Sir R.Morier, 10 Feb. 1886, A.D.Elliot, Life of Lord Goschen, II. 14; and Hartington to Granville, 19 Dec. 1885, P.R.O. 30.29.22A.

6 Granville to Gladstone, 21 Dec. 1885, Add.Mss.44178, f.251; and Granville to Spencer, 20 Dec. 1885, Granville vol., Althorp.

7 Chamberlain to Dilke, 21 Dec. 1885, Add.Mss.43876, f.180.

Chamberlain had no difficulty in believing the National Press Association statement[1] and he was much perturbed. The scheme which it outlined he declared to be "death and damnation"[2] - unworkable and worse than separation.[3] He admitted that many Liberals - perhaps even a majority - might be induced to accept it, but held that there was little likelihood that the country would do so. He believed that if the Conservatives were to dissolve upon the issue the Liberals would almost certainly "be beaten into a cocked hat".[4] He concluded that he and his friends must try to stop Gladstone, but that their immediate plan must be to "lie low" and let the situation shape itself before deciding, for should they openly commit themselves they would be left in the arms of their "greatest enemies" the Whigs.[5]

On the evening following the National Press Association announcement Chamberlain spoke at a banquet of the Birmingham Reform Club. He said that he considered it still premature for Liberals to attempt to settle the Irish question, but that

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1 Chamberlain to Dilke, 16 Dec. 1885, Add.Mss.43876, f. 171. ("The statement in the Standard is true, of course, and Mr. G's action is awfully compromising."); and Labouchere to H.Gladstone, 17 Dec. 1885, Add.Mss.46019, f.70.

2 Chamberlain to Dilke, 17 Dec. 1885, Add.Mss.43876, f.174.

3 Labouchere to Herbert Gladstone, 17 Dec. 1885, Add.Mss. 46019, f.70.

4 Chamberlain to Dilke, 18 Dec. 1885, Add.Mss.43876, f. 177.

5 Chamberlain to Dilke, 17, 18 and 26 Dec. 1885, Add.Mss.43876, ff. 174, 177 and 183; Chamberlain to Morley, 24 Dec. 1885, q.w.o., Garvin, II. 147-8; and Chamberlain to Labouchere, 24 Dec. 1885, A.Thorold, Life of Henry Labouchere, 262.

he believed he would be able to support Gladstone should he ever embody in a scheme his numerous statements that he was willing to grant Ireland the largest measure of local government compatible with the integrity of the Empire. He declared that Radicals were no less determined than Whigs to maintain the unity of the Empire and that Englishmen would be as resolute in preserving the Union of the United Kingdom as the Northern States had been in preserving the American Union.[1] Next day Gladstone remarked in a letter to him that "reading [the speech] . . . hastily I think we are very much in accord."[2] It is understandable that he should have made this mistake since Chamberlain had not defined what he meant by "local government" and Gladstone seems at all times to have been serenely confident that the self-government which he contemplated would in no way endanger the integrity of the empire.[3] Chamberlain in his reply unfortunately ignored the opportunity to correct Gladstone's misapprehension. He confined himself to only one argument against a home rule policy, but it was an argument which he may have assumed would carry more weight

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1 The Times, 18 Dec. 1885, p. 7.

2 Gladstone to Chamberlain (draft), 18 Dec. 1885, Add. Mss. 44126, f. 125 (Garvin, II. 142, and Chamberlain, 170).

3 Gladstone must have been strengthened in his confidence by his belief that the Irish people would be opposed to complete separation from Great Britain. In a memorandum which he drew up on 23 Dec. he noted, "It is much debated whether the Irish people are in favour of separation. I lean to the opinion that they are not. After all we must not presume them to be political madmen". (Add. Mss. 44312, f. 227).

than all the others :

> . . . If there were to be a dissolution on this question and the Liberal party or its leader were thought to be pledged to a separate parliament in Dublin, it is my belief that we should sustain a tremendous defeat. The English working classes, for various reasons, are distinctly hostile to Home Rule carried to this extent, and I do not think it would be possible to convert them before a General Election . . . [1]

During this period of exasperating uncertainty Hartington seems to have been among the more optimistic of the anti-home rule Liberals. After a discussion with Chamberlain, Harcourt and Dilke on New Year's Day he noted that Chamberlain and Harcourt were more impressed than he by the hopelessness either of resisting Gladstone or of governing Ireland by repression.[2] Lansdowne, at that time Governor General of Canada, had sent him a scheme of Irish land purchase and Hartington's reply is very helpful to an understanding of his position. He wrote :

> . . . But I do not feel so sure as you that we are approaching any very considerable extension of local self-government in Ireland. Although Mr. Gladstone's opinions are an important element in the case, I doubt whether public opinion will support any government in doing more than giving a County Government scheme on lines similar to those which may be settled for England. This will have to be offered not because anybody thinks it will be a good thing in itself, but in deference to the principles of equality of treatment. But it will be refused by the Parnellites and will probably not pass to the great regret of nobody. We may therefore have to struggle on for some time longer on the present system. I think that even in this case it would be very desirable that an effort should be made to settle the land question

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1 Chamberlain to Gladstone, 19 Dec. 1885, Add. Mss. 44126, f. 125 (Garvin, II. 142-3, and Chamberlain, 171-2).

2 Hartington to Granville, 2 Jan. 1886, P.R.O., 30.29.224 (Holland, II. 109-10).

> by buying out the landlords; but as I understand your scheme as indeed any scheme that has been proposed, its practicability even in theory, would depend on the creation of some Irish Local Body, which would be (nominally) responsible for the payment of the annuity of the sum due to the British Government.
>
> For the interest of landlords, therefore, I think that the best solution might probably be a Home Rule scheme combined with a fair Land Purchase measure. But when the political results of any form of Home Rule are fully understood, I doubt its acceptance by the English constituencies, and I am afraid that the landlords may for some time longer have to bear the chief brunt of the fight for the maintenance of the Union . . . .[1]

Chamberlain believed that Gladstone's home rule would include an independent Irish parliament and that all guarantees or securities whether for the protection of minorities or for the security of the Union would be completely illusory.[2] Westminster would not even be rid of Irish obstruction and interference.[3] He held that such an arrangement was but a step to separation and that separation was to be preferred to it.[4] "National councils",[5] he now admitted, were no longer practical politics. It was useless, he stated, to impose them on the

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1 Hartington to Lansdowne, 4 Jan. 1886, Chats. 340, 1884.

2 Chamberlain to Dilke, 26 Dec. 1885, Add. Mss. 43876, f. 183 (Gwynn and Tuckwell, II. 199-201).

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 In his speech at Warrington on 8 Sept. 1885 (The Times, 9 Sept. 1885) and in another at Glasgow a week later (The Times, 16 Sept. 1885) Chamberlain had suggested that the whole of the United Kingdom, or such parts as should wish it, should be given "national councils" with administrative functions and, perhaps also after a probationary period, powers of preparing legislation. Also, an article which Chamberlain had inspired in the July 1885 issue of the Fortnightly Review had advocated "national councils" with administrative functions and such legislative functions as are normally dealt with by private bills.

Nationalists when they repudiated them.[1] At the same time Chamberlain despaired of being able to stop Gladstone from laying his home rule proposals before the country.[2] The outcome was that he turned to what he believed were the two remaining workable possibilities - abolition of the British constitution, and complete separation.[3] On Boxing Day he wrote to Labouchere and to Dilke sketching a revolutionary scheme whereby the British constitution would be swept away and replaced by one modelled on that of the United States.[4] Under this plan legislatures with powers similar to those of the American state legislatures were to be set up in England, Scotland, and Wales, and possibly in both Southern Ireland and Ulster. He wrote to Labouchere, one feels certain, in the expectation that, as happened,[5] the letter would be forwarded to Herbert Gladstone. Eight days later Chamberlain again wrote to Labouchere suggesting a different but equally startling scheme.[6] This time Ireland was to be given independence except that like Canada and Australia she was to

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1 Ibid.

2 Hartington to Granville, 2 Jan. 1886, P.R.O., 30.29.29A (Holland, II. 108-9).

3 Chamberlain to Dilke, 21 Dec. 1885, Add.Mss.43876, f.180.

4 Chamberlain to Labouchere, 26 Dec. 1885, A.Thorold, Life of Henry Labouchere, 272; and Chamberlain to Dilke, 26 Dec. 1885, Add.Mss.43876, f.183.

5 Labouchere to H.Gladstone, 28 Dec. 1885, and 4 Jan. 1886, Add.Mss.46019, ff. 128 and 136.

6 Chamberlain to Labouchere, 3 Jan. 1886, A.Thorold, Life of Henry Labouchere, 278-79.

be allowed no control over foreign relations. She was to be called a protected state and England's responsibility confined to protecting her against foreign aggression. She was, moreover, to pay a fixed annual sum to cover her share of the National Debt, to establish a fund for extinguishing it, and to pay the cost of a military garrison in Ireland. She was to have a commons, a senate, and a governor who was to have the power to dissolve parliament, but no veto. Finally a commercial treaty was to be concluded which would pledge Ireland not to impose duties on manufacturers of Great Britain.

It is unlikely that Chamberlain had any real expectation that either of these schemes would be adopted. He made no effort to advance either of them and possibly would have been surprised if anyone else had done so. "As a Radical", he wrote to Dilke, "all these changes have no terrors for me, but is it conceivable that such a clean sweep of existing institutions could be made in order to justify the Irish demand for Home Rule?"[1] The first, or federal scheme, Chamberlain singled out in an article in the February number of the Fortnightly Review as the only plan which was likely to work without friction and to preserve the real unity of the Empire.[2]

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[1] Chamberlain to Dilke, 26 Dec. 1885, Add.Mss.43876, f.183.

[2] The article was signed "A Radical" but the authorship was a thinly disguised secret. Chamberlain admits the authorship in his memoir (Chamberlain, 104).

The second, or separation scheme he outlined at the meeting of Hartington, Harcourt, Dilke, and himself on New Year's Day.[1] But on both occasions Chamberlain appears to have put forward his scheme as one which he could consent to and not as one which he advocated.[2] These extreme proposals are an indication not only of Chamberlain's despair, but of his ruthless consistency. The one thing which he would not do was to support a scheme which he believed certain to result in embittered Anglo-Irish relations and finally in a separate, hostile Ireland. And, of course, Chamberlain with his wide experience of politics knew that such consistency would mean disaster both for his own political career and for the radical reforms which he championed - that in short it would be, as Morley told Labouchere,[3] political suicide.

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1 Lord Harcourt's diary, quoted, Cardiner, I. 557.

2 In the Fortnightly Review article Chamberlain stated that he considered no home rule scheme satisfactory to Parnell would be accepted by Parliament at that time and that it was the duty of statesmen to dispel the wild expectations which had been raised. He maintained that the settlement of the Irish land question would deprive home rule of all vitality and urged that the Liberal party should make the settlement of the land question its immediate policy. He also stated that the condition of Ireland did not justify a further coercion act, but that criminal outrage, were it to break out, would have to be dealt with, and that large scale Parliamentary obstruction could not be allowed even should the Speaker have to be given additional powers or the Irish members be excluded temporarily.

3 Labouchere to H.Gladstone, 30 Dec. 1885, Add. Mss. 46019, f. 128.

The Hawarden "Kite" was an unmistakable danger signal to all anti-home rule Liberals and almost at once they began to draw closer together. On the following day Derby wrote to Hartington, "It seems to me that those who think as we do ought to take council, and see at least that we are not placed in a position where we must either accept what we object to or split off from the party."[1] Two days later Harcourt, on behalf of himself and Chamberlain, wrote to Hartington advocating that he press Gladstone to call a meeting of the ex-Cabinet.[2] Hartington, because at such a meeting he would be opposed to Gladstone, declined and forwarded Harcourt's letter to Granville who could not have the same objection.[3] Granville also declined and gave as his reasons : "Two members of the late Cabinet are out of the House of Commons. The first consultations with Gladstone ought hardly to be in a meeting of sixteen people - with the probable result, as Harcourt justly says, of Gladstone resigning the leadership."[4] Granville reported the request to Gladstone who thanked him for having stopped it and added that he thought "no one in his senses could covenant to call the late Cabinet together . . .

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1 Derby to Hartington, 18 Dec. 1885, Chats. 340. 1855.

2 Harcourt to Hartington, 20 Dec. 1885, Chats. 340. 1859.

3 Hartington to Granville, 25 Dec. 1885, P.R.O., 30.29.22A (q.w.o. Holland, II, 104-5).

4 Granville to Hartington, 27 Dec. 1885, E.Fitzmaurice, Life of Lord Granville, II. 472.

even if there were something on which it was ready to take council."[1]

When Chamberlain learned that the attempt to have a meeting of the ex-Cabinet had failed, he suggested to Harcourt that they, together with Hartington and Dilke, should meet.[2] He further suggested that should the four of them be absolutely agreed they should meet Gladstone "and call on him to stand and deliver his plans" and then, if he insisted on going on without them, should lay their differences before a special meeting of the party.[3] Chamberlain's "stand and deliver" idea was most unrealistic and he quickly dropped it. It sprang from his well founded dread that if they remained quiet much longer Gladstone would have "the game in his hands."[4] It was, as he said, the bold course and "might prevent men from committing themselves or from being drawn over the precipice."[5]

Harcourt met Hartington next day and they agreed that the meeting should be held.[6] Hartington wished to make it as

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1 Gladstone to Granville, 28 Dec. 1885, P.R.O., 30.29.22A (Morley, III. 269).

2 Chamberlain to Harcourt, 27 Dec. 1885, Garvin, II. 153.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Hartington to Granville, 28 Dec. 1885, P.R.O., 30.29.22A (Holland, II. 105).

representative of the party as possible and asked Granville and Rosebery to join, but both declined.[1]

The meeting took place at Devonshire House on New Year's Day and was very amicable.[2] No one was able to suggest a scheme of action and the only decision of importance was that Hartington should write to Gladstone pressing him to inform the leaders as soon as possible and subsequently the party itself of his views and intentions on Ireland and the course to be taken on the meeting of Parliament.[3] Chamberlain, Harcourt, and Dilke differed from Hartington in having little hope of governing Ireland by repression.[4] Chamberlain had lost the pugnacity of five days earlier and said that he could support Ireland being made a protected state and suggested practically the same scheme which, as has been noted, he outlined in his letter to Labouchere two days later.[5] Hartington alone said that he could not join a government which promoted a legislative

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1 Hartington to Granville, 28 Dec. 1885; Marquess of Crewe, Lord Rosebery, I. 254; Hartington to Dilke, 29 Dec. 1885, Add. Mss. 43896, f. 189 (Gwynn and Tuckwell, II. 202); and Granville to Spencer, 29 Dec. 1885, Granville vol., Althorp.

2 Hartington to Granville, 2 Jan. 1886, P.R.O., 30.29.22A (Holland, II. 109-10).

3 Hartington to Gladstone, 1 Jan. 1886, Add. Mss. 44148 (Holland, II. 106-8).

4 Hartington to Granville, 2 Jan. 1886; and Hartington to Spencer, 3 Jan. 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp.

5 Lord Harcourt's diary, quoted, Gardiner, I. 557.

body for Ireland.[1] Dilke did not see his way clearly and said little.[2] Four days earlier he had written to Chamberlain that he believed Gladstone would be unable to form a government to promote an Irish legislature, but had added that he saw total separation looming ahead as less dangerous than separate parliaments.[3]

That evening Hartington wrote urging Gladstone on the lines agreed upon.[4] Gladstone replied that he had not a word to add to his letter of 17 December. He had done nothing and would do nothing, he stated, to convert his ideas, which were "floating ideas only", into intentions as he lacked sufficient information and wished to gain "whatever lights intervening time may possibly afford". There would be, he thought, ample time to discuss procedure when they should meet in London and as for a meeting of the party, that was a serious matter but might be found requisite.[5] Perhaps it is hardly surprising that on the day Hartington received this letter Granville found him extremely bitter against Gladstone.[6]

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1 Dilke's memoir, Gwynn and Tuckwell, II. 203; and Hartington to Gladstone, 1 Jan. 1886. (Gwynn and Tuckwell have printed Dilke's memoir accurately and in full and references in this thesis will be to the printed version).

2 Dilke's memoir, Gwynn and Tuckwell, II. 203.

3 Dilke to Chamberlain (copy), 28 Dec. 1885, Add. Mss. 43953, f. 76.

4 Hartington to Gladstone, 1 Jan. 1886.

5 Gladstone to Hartington, 2 Jan. 1886, Chats. 340. 1883 (Holland, II. 108-9).

6 Granville to Spencer, 4 Jan. 1886, Granville vol., Althorp.

The last remark in Gladstone's letter was not merely a phrase intended to placate Hartington and his three fellow malcontents. A week earlier Gladstone had proposed in the event of his being asked to form a government to call a party meeting and to inform it that he would accept office only if assured of its general support for a plan of safe-guarded home rule.[1] Incidentally, Gladstone showed this memorandum to Granville and Spencer, but not to Hartington.[2] He feared, he said, to challenge Hartington before personal communications could be established.[3] However, he did discuss the subject of the memorandum with Grosvenor and asked him to discuss it with Hartington.[4]

Hartington, Chamberlain, Dilke, and Trevelyan corresponded on whether they should meet Gladstone in London as a <u>posse comitatus</u> or separately.[5] Without exception they favoured meeting him in a body. Hartington wrote that should they be forced to meet him singly they could urge further collective consultation.[6] However, Gladstone forestalled any attempt at

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1 Memorandum by Gladstone, 26 Dec. 1885, P.R.O., 30.29.22A (Morley, III. 270-2).

2 Granville to Spencer, 29 Dec. 1885, Granville vol., Althorp; and Spencer to Gladstone (copy), 29 Dec. 1885, P.R.O.,30.29.22A.

3 <u>Ibid</u>.

4 Gladstone to Granville, 26 Dec. 1885, Morley III, 270.

5 Hartington to Granville, 10 Jan. 1886, P.R.O., 30.29.22A (Holland, II. 111); Dilke's memoir, Gwynn and Tuckwell, II. 204; Gardiner, I. 558; and Garvin, II. 163.

6 Dilke's memoir, Gwynn and Tuckwell, II. 204.

collective pressure by inviting them to interviews at different times. "It is evident that he proposes to nobble us in detail", was Chamberlain's bitter comment.[1]

At the interviews Gladstone held to the same position as he had done in his letter to Hartington. He still had "opinions" but no "plan" for discussion and hoped that even yet one might be produced by the Government.[2] On the day Parliament assembled (12 January) a meeting of the former cabinet was held at noon,[3] and the question of immediate policy was hotly discussed but once more Gladstone refused to commit himself on Ireland.[4]

Three days later Hartington wrote to him and included the warning : "But I can scarcely doubt that in some form or other an Irish debate will arise on the Address, which will make it impossible for those who are in favour of maintaining the legislative union as it exists to abstain from reasserting their opinions".[5] Gladstone was thoroughly alarmed[6] and wrote asking Granville to use his influence with

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1 Chamberlain to Harcourt, 8 Jan. 1886, q.w.o., Garvin, II. 163.

2 Dilke's memoir, Gwynn and Tuckwell, II. 204; Gardiner, I. 558; and Garvin, II. 163.

3 Marquess of Crewe, Lord Rosebery, I. 257.

4 Gardiner, I. 559.

5 Hartington to Gladstone, 15 Jan. 1886, Add. Mss. 44148, f. 203 (Holland, II. 111-12).

6 Granville to Spencer, 16 Jan. 1886, Granville vol., Althorp; and Granville to Hartington (draft), [n.d.] Jan. 1886, P.R.O., 30.29.22A.

Hartington. "It seems to me that if a gratuitous declaration of this kind is made", his letter stated, "it must produce an explosion; and that in a week's time Hartington will have to consider whether he will lead the Liberal party himself or leave it to chaos. He will make my position impossible . . . If he still meditates it ought not the party to be previously informed?"[1] Granville gave the letter to Hartington[2] but Hartington refused to be influenced.

The speech from the throne was vague on Ireland, but contained a declaration in favour of the Union and a hint that special powers would be asked for. In the debate Gladstone stated the attitude which he had been expressing for some time, but disclosed nothing of his intention: he thought that there was sympathy between Salisbury and himself on Ireland; he had done and would do nothing which would arouse prejudice or prevent the question from being judged on its merits; there could be no greater calamity than that it should be brought within the lines of party conflict; and the Government were the only people who could act in the matter.[3]

Eleven years later Gladstone described how he spent the night in extreme anxiety lest a declaration in favour of the

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1 Gladstone to Granville, 18 Jan. 1886, Chats. 340.1909 (Morley, III. 282-3 and Holland, II. 112-13).

2 Granville to Hartington (draft), [n.d.] Jan. 1886.

3 Hansard, CCCII, cols. 100-20.

Union should be brought forward. He felt pretty certain that such an event "would in its moral effect shut the doors of the existing parliament against home rule" for he doubted if two hundred would oppose it.[1] In an effort to forestall such a declaration[2] he had in his speech said that he would keep his own counsel and reserve his freedom of action and "as an old parliamentary hand" recommended others to do the same.[3] Hartington had already threatened the dreaded course and Goschen was pressing him to act.[4] On the first evening of the debate, Albert Grey, a friend of Goschen, asserted that if Gladstone's closed hand were forced open a parliament on College Green would be found in it. He appealed to Liberal leaders, especially Hartington and Chamberlain, to announce their determination to uphold the Union.[5] Next day the debate continued with no move against home rule until late in the evening A.R.D.Elliot, another supporter of Goschen, endeavoured to goad the anti-home rule Liberals into action.[6] Goschen had planned a strong speech[7] but thought that his

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1 Reminiscence written by Gladstone in 1897, Morley, III.283-5.

2 Ibid.

3 Hansard, CCCII, col. 112.

4 Goschen to his wife, 19 Jan. 1886, q.w.o., Elliot, II. 8.

5 Hansard, CCCII, cols. 142-4.

6 Ibid. cols. 256-60.

7 Goschen to Sir R. Morier, 10 Feb. 1886, q.w.o., Elliot, II. 13-16.

best tactic was to wait until after Hartington should have spoken as that would emphasise Hartington's leadership and give him "the whole weight of having stood firm".[1] However, Elliot's speech caused Goschen to abandon his intention of speaking as he felt that to have done so "would have been pointedly and publicly to have taken the lead out of Hartington's hand" and would have appeared as though he had "put Elliot up . . . but did not know that he would take the line he did".[2]

The silence of Hartington, Chamberlain and the other leaders considerably demoralised the ordinary anti-home rule Liberal members. One of them wrote to Hartington : "I fear the opportunity has been lost now for you to rally your supporters; . . . should the government be turned out . . . I very much fear the temptation of office will prevent many making any stand, more especially as after the silence of yourself and others they will feel that the party are drifting towards it".[3] Albert Grey, seeing that his intervention in the debate had achieved little, tried to have a memorial got up.[4] Goschen and Grosvenor were sympathetic but the idea did not materialize. Perhaps as Heneage pointed

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1 Goschen to his wife, 20 Jan. 1886, q.w.o., Elliot, II. 9.

2 Goschen to Sir R. Morier, 10 Feb. 1886.

3 E. Heneage (Gt. Grimsby) to Hartington, 22 Jan. 1886, Chats. 340. 1912.

4 A.Grey to Hartington, 22 Jan. 1886, Chats. 340. 1914.

out to Hartington[1] the wording was a difficulty and that with so many new members in the House it would be impossible to obtain many signatures before everyone knew about it.

Chamberlain, although he took no part in the debate, made on the 22nd a futile, behind-the-scenes effort to hand off home rule. Probably encouraged by a report from Labouchere that it was still uncertain whether Gladstone and the Nationalists would come to terms,[2] he drafted out a memorandum which he gave to Labouchere to read to Parnell[3] to whom he also sent a copy through O'Shea.[4] In it Chamberlain advocated that for the present the Conservatives should be allowed to remain in office, but if that were impossible they should be overthrown on some non-Irish issue. He then came to his main purpose :

> . . . If Mr. Gladstone were to come in and immediately propose a scheme of Home Rule it is almost certain that in the present state of opinion he would be defeated, and an appeal to the country would in all probability result in a Tory majority . . .
>
> The question is would Mr. Parnell co-operate with a Radical or Liberal Government in an endeavour to make a final arrangement by means of some large operation of land purchase, without pressing for the immediate consideration of Home Rule proposals?

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1 E. Heneage to Hartington, 22 Jan. 1886.

2 Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 176.

3 Labouchere to H.Gladstone, 22 Jan. 1886, Add. Mss. 46019, f. 159.

4 Garvin, II. 166.

> In any case these proposals would have to come in the first instance from the Irish party. Is Mr. Parnell prepared with a definite scheme? And in this case would he be satisfied to submit it to a large and representative committee? [1]

Parnell replied at once through Labouchere. Ignoring the key suggestions that the land problem be dealt with first and that home rule be given a non-party examination, he bluntly stated that, admitting Mr. Gladstone could give no pledges, he must know two things :

> . . . 1. That Mr. Gladstone if called upon by the Queen to form a government, will form one, i.e. if Goschen, Hartington, etc. decline to join, that he will not throw up the sponge . . .
>
> 2. . . . that if Mr. Gladstone comes in he will act on his speech, and at once bring in his scheme for the Government of Ireland. [2]

On the third day of the debate the member for Forfarshire moved an amendment to extend the "Three F's" of the Irish Land Act of 1881 to Great Britain. Few thought the amendment of much importance, but Hartington, without any warning to his supporters, voted against it with the Conservatives. His action was a tactical blunder and tended to detract from him as a possible alternative to Gladstone.

On the following afternoon (26 January) Hicks-Beach announced that the Government planned to introduce a coercion

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[1] Chamberlain's memorandum, 22 Jan. 1886, Garvin, II. 166-7, and Chamberlain, 177-8.

[2] Labouchere to Chamberlain, 22 Jan. 1886, A. Thorold, Life of Henry Labouchere, 286-7.

bill in two days time.[1] On this news Gladstone determined to bring down the Government at once.[2] For the purpose he had at hand an amendment which had been agreed to at the meeting of most of the ex-Cabinet on the morning of the Queen's speech. Dilke, who was present, informs us that they met apparently without any policy and that when Chamberlain produced the amendment they accepted it without discussion as a way out of their differences and difficulties.[3] It was later known as Colling's amendment and expressed regret that the Queen's speech had contained no promise of a measure to enable farm workers and other country dwellers to obtain allotments and small holdings. Ordinarily such an amendment would have had few but Radical supporters and Goschen considered that "the sending out of a whip in its favour was a fearful blow at the Moderate Party".[4 & 5] Now it went forward with the blessing of Gladstone. All knew, of course, that the immediate issue

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1 The proposed bill suppressed the National League and dealt with intimidation, public order and the protection of life and property.

2 Reminiscence written by Gladstone in 1897, Morley, III.287-8.

3 Dilke's memoir, Gwynn and Tuckwell, II. 205.

4 Goschen to Sir R. Morier, 10 Feb. 1886, q.w.o., Elliot, II. 13-16.

5 Goschen was not alone in deploring official support for the amendment, e.g. the Spectator wrote: "The great majority of the Liberal Party, headed by Mr. Gladstone, bound itself by that vote to a new policy, which is in principle that the state may employ the general wealth of the community, and may even expropriate property, in order to reduce the poverty of certain sections of the people. That principle, however moderately or carefully applied at first, is the very essence of socialism . . ." (Spectator, 30 Jan. 1886, p. 136).

at stake had little to do with agrarian policy.

The debate was a comparatively short one and the division was taken around one o'clock in the morning of the 27th. The Government was beaten by seventy-nine votes. The Nationalists voted with Gladstone, but of equal or greater significance was that seventy-six Liberals, including John Bright, abstained from voting and that eighteen voted with the Conservatives. Among the eighteen were Hartington, Goschen, James, and Courtney.[1]

The resignation of Salisbury was delayed by the disinclination of the Queen to allow Gladstone into office.[2] She even suggested a dissolution[3] and not until both Salisbury and Goschen had advised that she send for Gladstone did she accept the inevitability of his premiership.[4] Ponsonby delivered the Queen's invitation after midnight on the 29th and next morning Gladstone set about forming his new cabinet.[5]

John Morley, with reason, has suggested that not since Canning formed his cabinet in 1827 had anyone been faced with

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1 The others were : A.Barnes, J.Corbett, Sir S.Crossley, D.Davies, W.Davies, Lord Ebrington, Admiral Egerton, A.R.Elliot, A.H.Grey, Sir J.Lubbock, Sir John St.Aubyn, C.Seeley, J.Westlake and E.R.Wodehouse.

2 Queen's correspondence, 27-30 Jan. 1886, Letters of Queen Victoria, 3rd Series, I. Chap. i; and Queen to Sir H.Ponsonby, 27, and 29 Jan. 1886, A. onsonby, Henry Ponsonby, 206-8.

3 Cecil, III. 290.

4 Queen's correspondence, 27-30 Jan. 1886; and Queen to Sir H.Ponsonby, 27, and 29 Jan. 1886.

5 Note by Ponsonby, 30 Jan. 1886, A.Ponsonby, op. cit., 207; and Morley, III. 290.

such difficulties as now confronted Gladstone.[1 & 2] Of the twenty-one men who had served in the previous Liberal cabinet eleven were to become Liberal Unionists.[3] At the New Year's Day meeting in Devonshire House Dilke had prophesied that they would be asked to join, not a government to promote home rule, but one to consider it.[4] This was the course which Gladstone adopted. He prepared the well known memorandum which he showed to those whom he asked to take office. It ran:

> I propose to examine whether it is or is not practical to comply with the desire widely prevalent in Ireland, and testified by the return of eighty-five out of one hundred and three representatives, for the establishment by Statute of a Legislative Body, to sit in Dublin, and to deal with Irish as distinguished from Imperial affairs; in such a manner as would be just to each of the three Kingdoms, equitable with reference to every class of the

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1 Morley, III. 290-1.

2 Here is an indication of how hard-pressed Gladstone was to find suitable men for at least certain posts. Sir Lyon Playfair, who had been Post Master General in 1873-4, but had not been in Gladstone's previous ministry, thus described how he came to accept office: ". . . I was offered it [Vice-Presidency of the Privy Council] yesterday but declined it. I met Mr. Gladstone at dinner at Marlborough House, and he told me how deeply he was grieved, and entreated me to reconsider my refusal. Lord Granville and Lord Spencer pressed me also very strongly. Today I . . . was received first by Mrs. Gladstone. She told me that he was very poorly, and that I was the cause, for he was quite upset by my refusal. The G.O.M. then expressed his disappointment. He said that he knew I was in sympathy with him, and could not understand my reasons for refusing to join him; that as I had taken little interest in party politics he could not put me in the Cabinet, but that anyone who stood by him in his emergency had a right to that soon. . . . I made the condition that I should have a free hand in debate." (Playfair to S.H.Russell, 4 Feb. 1886, Memoirs and correspondence of Lyon Playfair, 352).

3 The eleven were: Hartington, Chamberlain, Bright, Derby, Northbrook, Selbourne, Carlingford, Argyll, Trevelyan, Lodson, and Forster (died 5 April, 1886).

4 Dilke's memoir, Gwynn and Tuckwell, II. 203.

people of Ireland, conducive to the social order and harmony of that country, and calculated to support and consolidate the unity of the Empire on the combined basis of Imperial Authority and mutual attachment.

It is easy to assume that Gladstone, with far-sighted cunning, was endeavouring to manoeuvre those colleagues who did not go the whole way with him on Irish self-government into a position from which they could escape only with great difficulty when later they should discover his real intention. To give plausibility to this assumption are the facts that once the government had been formed he acted as though the sole purpose of its existence was, not to examine the practicability of, but to grant a Dublin legislature, and that in little more than two months he had drafted the first home rule bill (with the aid of Parnell through Morley) and had laid it before Parliament. However, throughout his long career Gladstone had been one of the most conscientious and scrupulous of politicians and it seems unlikely that in his old age he should deliberately stoop to a deceit of that kind.

What then is the explanation of the memorandum? The first which springs to one's mind is that perhaps Gladstone, like so many of his contemporaries, had doubts on whether a workable and reasonably permanent legislative body could be devised which would yet have the features that he had determined upon. But it appears incredible that he should have taken so important a step as to propose the formation of a government to examine the practicability of granting something which he recognized might, after all, prove to be of the same nature as squaring the circle.

It seems more likely that what Gladstone wished to examine was not the abstract problems of Irish home rule, but certain down to earth factors of which he was still uncertain. Would a sufficient number of the rank and file support him?[1] Was Ireland in a sufficiently peaceful condition to merit the experiment?[2] - a fact which he claimed could be known only by the government in power.[3] Would the Nationalists as a party consent to home rule with the limitations that he had determined upon?[4]

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[1] An account of this period which Gladstone wrote in the autumn of 1897 illustrates how uncertain he was of the support to be expected from his party. "When we came to the debate on the Address I had to face a night of extreme anxiety.. . . What I dreaded was lest some one should have gone back to the precedent of 1833, when the Address in reply to the speech was virtually made the vehicle of a solemn declaration in favour of the Act of Union. . . . I . . . strongly advised the party to keep its own counsel, and await for a little the development of events. Happily this counsel was taken; had it been otherwise, the early formation of a government favourable to home rule would in all likelihood have become an impossibility. For although our home rule bill was eventually supported by more than 300 members, I doubt whether, if the question had been prematurely raised on the night of the Address, as many as 200 would have been disposed to act in that sense". (Quoted, Morley, III. 284-5).

[2] Gladstone stated on several occasions that home rule could be taken up only if an adequate state of law and order prevailed in Ireland. (Gladstone to Hartington (draft), 17 Dec. 1885, Add. Mss. 44148, f. 167; Gladstone to Hartington, 2 Jan. 1886, Chats. 340,1883; Gladstone to Granville, 18 Jan. 1886, Chats. 340.1909; and Spencer to Granville, 29 Dec. 1885, P.R.O., 30.29.22A).

[3] Spencer to Granville, 29 Dec. 1885.

[4] On 18 Nov. Gladstone had written to Hartington,"The main questions are, does Irish Nationalism contemplate a fair division of Imperial burdens, and will it agree to just provisions for the protection of the landlords". (draft, Add. Mss. 44148 (Holland, II. 94-95).

The memorandum, one suspects, sprang from a dilemma: Gladstone did not wish to commit himself fully until he should know the answers to these key questions[1] and at the same time he wished to be certain of a cabinet willing to concede his Irish aim should conditions be favourable. The fatal flaw was his assumption that those who could agree with him on the desirability of his home rule aim would also agree with him on its feasibility. But for it there would not be the impression that he was practising a calculated deceit.

Gladstone sent for Hartington, but it could have been with little expectation that he would join his government. The interview was short and friendly and Hartington promised to write a letter, which could be shown to the Queen, stating his reasons for refusing office.[2] In the letter he wrote that his objections to an Irish legislature, whether subordinate or independent, were as strong as ever. He was unable to attach great importance to a distinction between examination and the actual conception and announcement of a plan because "the Government which had undertaken to enter into such an examination can scarcely stop short of proposing a policy founded

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[1] In a memorandum which Gladstone drew up on 26 Dec. 1885 he wrote "It is impossible to justify the contention that as a condition previous to asserting the right and duty of a Parliamentary majority, the party or the leaders should commit themselves on a measure, about which they can form no final judgment until by becoming the Government they can hold all the necessary communications". (copy, P.R.O., 30.29.22a).

[2] Hartington to Duke of Devonshire, 30 Jan. 1886, q.w.o., Holland, II. 142; and James' memoir, Lord Askwith, Lord James of Hereford, 164.

upon it". In addition he had, he stated, so deeply pledged himself against an Irish legislature that it would be dishonourable if he were now to assist in creating one. He felt that such a step would be disastrous for his political influence as he would bring with him none of his followers and they under another leader would probably be more hostile to the Government than under himself. Then comes the most interesting part :

> I am now of the opinion, he wrote, that these declarations having been made, it is necessary that they should assume a practical shape. The country must now understand what concession of legislative independence is considered safe and practical by any responsible party, and it must now be proved whether it is, or is not possible to reconcile the demands of the Irish Home Rule party with the deliberate opinion of the majority of Englishmen and Scotchmen.
>
> While therefore I reserve full liberty to form the best judgment I can on your proposals when they may assume a definite shape, and can in no way commit myself to their support, I hope and believe that it may be possible for me, as a private member, to do something to prevent obstacles being placed in the way of a fair trial being given to the policy of the new Government.
>
> I am fully convinced that the alternative policy of governing Ireland without large concessions to the national sentiment, presents difficulties of a tremendous character which, in my opinion, could now only be faced by the support of a nation united by the consciousness that the fullest opportunity had been given for the production and consideration of a conciliatory policy.[1]

This is not quite the kind of letter which one would expect from a convinced upholder of the Union. The explanation is simple. The tone of the letter sprang from Hartington's deep

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[1] Hartington to Gladstone, 30 Jan. 1886, Add. Mss. 44148, f. 212 (Holland, II. 122-3).

rooted regard for his old leader and the substance from his fear that an early overthrow of Gladstone would in the long run prove a worse blow at the Union than if he were allowed to lay a scheme of home rule before the country and then be defeated. As Hartington explained to James almost immediately after the interview - "I do not like Home Rule, and never shall, but as things now are, if I oppose Mr. Gladstone and am called upon for an alternative policy, I have not got one, except the bayonet, and I do not think the Liberal party will stand that".[1] This waiting policy which Hartington adopted was the soundest one for his future influence. As the Spectator noted six weeks later, had he prejudged Gladstone's proposals and allied himself with the Conservatives he would have been followed by only a handful of Liberals and would then have lost all influence with the Liberal rank and file.[2 & 3]

Chamberlain's position was one of extreme difficulty and very different from what he had envisaged in the autumn.

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1 James' Memoir, Lord Askwith, Lord James of Hereford, 164.

2 Spectator, 13 March 1886, p. 340.

3 D.Heneage later wrote in a letter to Spencer (17 March 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp) that on being offered the Chancellorship of the Duchy of Lancaster: "I demurred and proposed to go to see Lord Hartington and Primrose [Gladstone's private secretary] left the room and on coming back said that he had seen Grosvenor and he wished him to tell me that Hartington had advised all his friends to join the Government." Possibly Hartington did do so, but one would like further evidence before accepting Heneage's statements as absolutely accurate. Not only had it been relayed through more than one mouth, but Heneage when he wrote it had just resigned his office and was endeavouring to defend his action in joining the Government in the first place.

During the election Morley had called for a bold policy of Irish self-government and at the end of December he and Chamberlain had parted, as far as politics went, after a misunderstanding.[1] Dilke had been cited as a co-respondent in a divorce suit and was helpless to influence events one way or another. Anyway, he too was soon to declare for home rule. Shaw-Lefevre had been defeated in the election and was out of Parliament until May when he came back pledged to a separate legislature, but against the Irish land purchase bill. Harcourt was as opposed to an Irish legislature as most but held that the only alternative was coercion and blood in Irland - a hopeless proposition, he believed, as the American Irish would keep up a perpetual supply of arms, dynamite and assassins while in Britain a large party, armed with the taunt "if you had followed the advice of Mr. G. this would not have happened", would make the position of the Government impossible.[2] From the moment the Tories sold the pass to Parnell for office in June resistance to home rule had been a lost cause, Harcourt had written to Chamberlain on Christmas Day.[3] In a further letter on the eve of the New Year's Day meeting he had stated that he foresaw that they might have to let Gladstone

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1 Chamberlain-Morley correspondence, 24 Dec. 1885 - 1 Jan. 1886; Viscount Morley, Recollections, I. 205-9; and Garvin, II. 147-51.

2 Harcourt to Hartington, 20 Dec., Chats. 340.1880; 22 Dec., q.w.o., Gardiner, I. 552-3; and 24 Dec. 1885, Gardiner, I. 553-5; and Harcourt to Chamberlain [20-31 Dec. 1885. n.d. given in Gardiner], q.w.o., Gardiner, I. 556.

3 Gardiner, I. 555.

try his hand so that no one would be able to say that all methods had not been exhausted.[1]

Chamberlain if he refused office would seriously weaken the Government and his action would be fully understood by few - especially in the constituencies. This was particularly so as very many were unable to see that one who had advocated "national councils" could be opposed on principle to a separate Irish legislature. And then there was the factor of the unknown. Perhaps after all Gladstone would be forced either by circumstances or by his colleagues to adopt a scheme which would be little more than one of "national councils". To refuse office when faced with a definite plan for an Irish legislature was one thing, but to refuse because one had been asked to examine the question was a very different matter.

Gladstone offered Chamberlain the Admiralty, an uncongenial and cramping post for anyone bent on having the "Unauthorised Programme" translated into legislation. In addition Chamberlain was reluctant to throw upon his young and comparatively inexperienced daughter responsibility for the large amount of entertaining expected of the First Lord.[2] However, he did not press his objections at the initial interview,[3] but concentrated

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1 Harcourt to Chamberlain, 28-31 Dec. 1885 .

2 Note by Sir Austen Chamberlain, 7 Dec. 1934, quoted by editor, Chamberlain, 185.

3 The description of this interview is based on Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 185-6 and 190.

on the more fundamental question of Gladstone's intentions for Ireland. He must know about that first, he told Gladstone, for if a separate parliament was to be established in Dublin he could not accept office. Gladstone explained that as yet he had not made up his mind to any plan or proposal and that no one would be pledged to any conclusion which might arise out of the proposed enquiry. He then produced the memorandum. Chamberlain, having read it, stated his own views. He said that he was opposed to an Irish parliament and that he thought negotiations should be resumed with the Nationalists on the basis of the "national councils" proposal. He pointed out that agreement might be reached on the questions of land, education, and municipal government and that these would occupy much time before they could even consider Irish government. Gladstone asked Chamberlain if he prejudged the enquiry or did he think he could consider impartially its results. Chamberlain answered that he was not committed to a final judgment but felt it only fair that he should state his views. Gladstone thereupon said that he saw in what Chamberlain had told him no impediment to his joining the Government. Chamberlain asked and was granted a few hours in which to make up his mind. He decided on office and wrote a letter of acceptance which he took back with him to Gladstone. The letter can have brought Gladstone little consolation for he must have seen in it a clearing of the decks rather than anything else.

> . . . But I have already thought it due to you, wrote Chamberlain, to say that according to my present judgment it will not be found possible to conciliate these conditions

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> with the establishment of a National Legislative body sitting in Dublin; and I have explained my own preference for an attempt to come to terms with the Irish members on the basis of a more limited scheme of local government coupled with proposals for the settlement of the land, and perhaps also the Education questions.
>
> You have been kind enough, after hearing these opinions to repeat your request that I should join your Government and you have explained that in this case I shall retain "unlimited liberty of judgment and rejection" on any scheme that may ultimately be proposed and that the full consideration of such minor proposals as I have referred to, as an alternative to any larger arrangement, will not be excluded by you. . . .[1]

On the following day Chamberlain wrote to Gladstone referring to his reluctance to accept the Admiralty and asked for a further interview.[2] Gladstone granted the interview later on the same day.[3] He asked Chamberlain which office he would prefer.[4] Chamberlain replied that he would like the Colonial Office[5] whereupon, according to Dilke, Gladstone made the unfortunate remark, "Oh! A Secretary of State".[6] Gladstone wished to hold the Colonial Office for his old friend Granville, who, it was generally recognized, was no longer fitted for the Foreign Office.

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1 Chamberlain to Gladstone, 30 Jan. 1886, Add.Mss.44126, f.132 (Chamberlain, 137-8; and q.w.o. Garvin, II. 172). Chamberlain added the following sentence on Gladstone's suggestion, "On the other hand I have no difficulty in assuring you of my readiness to give an unprejudiced examination to any more extensive proposals that may be made with an anxious desire that the result may be more favourable than I am at present able to anticipate" (Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 137).

2 Chamberlain to Gladstone, 31 Jan. 1886, Add.Mss.44126, f.136.

3 Dilke's memoir, Gwynn and Tuckwell, 205.

4 Ibid.; and Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 138.

5 Ibid.

6 Dilke's memoir, loc. cit.

As a result he did not take up Chamberlain's reply but instead asked him if he would accept his former post of President of the Board of Trade.[1] Chamberlain answered that he would, if Gladstone desired it, but that he would prefer a change.[2] Next day Chamberlain mentioned to Harcourt that he would be willing to take the Local Government Board as it would enable him to prepare the local government bill, which he assumed would be the first work of the Ministry.[3] Harcourt informed Gladstone, who agreed to the suggestion,[4] and so Chamberlain entered the Cabinet as President of the Local Government Board. "As to Ireland", he wrote to Bright a day or two later, "I have very little hope - not much in agreeing with my colleagues in proposing anything - and still less of finding that what we propose is a solution."[5]

Spencer accepted the Lord Presidency. His support of Gladstone was of great importance at this crisis and in the following months. Morley in after years considered that, without it, the attempt to give home rule would have been useless from the first.[6] Spencer had been Viceroy of Ireland

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1 Chamberlain's memoir, loc. cit.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., and Dilke's memoir, loc. cit.

4 Gladstone to Chamberlain (draft), 2 Feb. 1886, Add. Mss. 44126, f. 139.

5 Chamberlain to Bright, 5 Feb. 1886, Add. Mss. 43387, f. 22.

6 Viscount Morley, Recollections, I. 219.

in Gladstone's first ministry and again following the murder of Lord Frederick Cavendish in 1382 and was credited with a greater knowledge of that country and had undoubtedly a greater experience of the coercive maintenance of law and order, and of its limitations, than any other man. His advocacy of an Irish legislature required great moral courage for not only had the policy of his previous viceroyalty been based to all outward appearances on the refusal to recognise the Nationalist demand for a separate parliament, but he had been the victim of much brutal and unfair Nationalist vituperation.[1] He now acquiesced in the policy of a separate legislature because he believed that the only alternative was coercion of the most rigid type and that all policies involving coercion would sooner or later be sold by someone in return for the parliamentary support of the Nationalists and, moreover, would not be tolerated for long by the English people.[2] As Northbrook wrote

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[1] On 31 Dec. Spencer confessed to Campbell-Bannerman "If I remain of the opinion which you heard and I have to express it, I shall do that which surpasses anything I have ever done before as to horror" (Spencer to Campbell-Bannerman, Add.Mss.41228, f. 305) and on the previous day he had written to Rosebery ". . . how odious (and maybe wicked) it is to think that Parnell and his crew are to govern Ireland" (Spencer to Rosebery (draft), Miscellaneous, Althorp.).

[2] Wolverton to Gladstone, 13 Dec. 1885, Add.Mss.44349, f. 184; Spencer to Granville, 29 Dec. 1885, P.R.O., 30.29.22A; Northbrook to Spencer, 7 Jan. 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp; Spencer to Lansdowne (copy), 2 Feb. 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp; Spencer to Sir Rowland Blennerhasset (copy), 7 Feb. 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp; Spencer to Lord Longford (copy), 31 March 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp; Spencer's speech on second home rule bill, Hansard (1893), XVII, cols. 11-12; Viscount Morley, Recollections, I. 219; and Gardiner, I. 556-7.

to him, "You do not look upon Home Rule as a good thing in itself, but only as the least bad of two bad alternatives."[1] Spencer's *sine qua non* for a home rule measure was that it must be one which made impossible the exploitation of the landlords or separation from Great Britain.[2]

Trevelyan, Chamberlain's fellow Radical, consented to take the Secretaryship for Scotland. He had been Irish Chief Secretary under the previous Liberal administration and this fact now increased the influence of his views. Unlike some he believed that a separate Irish legislature was by no means inevitable and that a sustained policy of coercion could, if necessary, be maintained.[3] He especially objected (perhaps as a result of his experiences as Chief Secretary during the police strike of 1882) to the relinquishing of any control of law and order to an Irish body.[4] He strongly denounced the suggestion that Ireland should have her own parliament and in addition be represented in Westminster on imperial matters.[5] Such an arrangement, he declared, would make the Irish masters

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1 Northbrook to Spencer, 7 Jan. 1886.

2 *Ibid.*; and Northbrook to Spencer, 16 Dec. 1885, Miscellaneous, Althorp.

3 Campbell-Bannerman to Spencer, 8 Jan. 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp; and Northbrook to Spencer, 7 Jan. 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp.

4 Campbell-Bannerman to Spencer, 8 Jan. 1886; and Trevelyan's speech at Snitterford, Warwickshire, 30 Dec. 1885, *The Times*, 31 Dec. 1885.

5 Trevelyan's speech, 30 Dec. 1885.

of both the Dublin and the Imperial Parliament.[1] His own proposal was that responsibility for education, roads, bridges, asylums, and poor rates and poor relief should be given to freely elected Irish bodies which would be entrusted with the expenditure of the money allotted by the Treasury to these objects plus such additional sums as they themselves should decide to raise by additional Irish internal taxes.[2] Trevelyan's family had long been connected with India and with him an important reason against an Irish parliament was lest it should set a precedent for India.[3]

Goschen was invited to accept office although Gladstone could have had little hope that he would. The interview was short and courteous, but the result was negative.[4]

Sir Henry James, who had pledged himself against home rule during the election,[5] refused both the Lord Chancellorship[6] and the Home Office. Gladstone and Mrs. Gladstone begged him to join the administration, but he would not yield.[7] He

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1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 Conversation between Trevelyan and editor of Northern Whig, T.Macknight, Ulster, as it is, II. 140.

4 Morley, III. 294.

5 In one speech James had told his constituents, "Mr. Gladstone has been more than aleader to me - he has been a father. But, even if he were to go down on his knees, and beg me to vote for Home Rule, I should be constrained by conscience to say him Nay". (G.W.E.Russell, Politics and personalities, 43).

6 Mr. Ensor remarks (England, 1870-1914, 97), "Sir H.James . . . refused the lord chancellorship - said to have been never before refused in modern times". It was however refused at least once - in 1868 by Selborne, who again refused it on this occasion.

7 James' memoir, Lord Askwith, Lord James of Hereford, 160-4.

promised to return for a further interview, but instead he wrote to Herbert Gladstone asking to be excused it as his views remained unaltered and he wished to be spared "that pain which the personal expression of a refusal to comply with any request which Mr. Gladstone may make" would cause him.[1] He concluded his letter with an assurance that he would endeavour to give "an assidious support to the New Government" (James is probably not quite fair to himself in this letter as it suggests that the main reason for his refusal was the intervention of the chairman of his election committee).

Another excellent example of the domination which Gladstone, through his personality, had over friends and colleagues is provided by John Bright, who in spite of his age was still one of the great political forces in the country. Bright was opposed to the granting of an Irish legislature,[2] but because of his regard for Gladstone[3] steadily refused to take part in the controversy either in or out of Parliament. Gladstone later described Bright's refusal to support him at this time as a grievous loss and declared that he would rather have had Bright with him than all the other unionist Liberals.[4]

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1 James to Herbert Gladstone, 31 Jan. 1886, Add.Mss.46038, f. 19.

2 The diaries of John Bright (edited by P.Bright), Chapter XVIII; G.M.Trevelyan, The life of John Bright, Chapter XXI; and R.B.O'Brien, The life of Charles Stewart Parnell, II. 145-52.

3 Bright to Gladstone, 13 May 1886, Add.Mss. 44113, f. 224 (Morley, III. 327-9).

4 Conversation with Gladstone, 31 Dec. 1888, Lord Rendel, Personal Papers, conversations with Mr. Gladstone, 1888-98, p.56.

Gladstone had the impression in early August that, like Granville, Derby was inclining towards Irish self-government.[1] He was quite mistaken:[2] Derby both then and afterwards was stoutly opposed to it. Gladstone had learned how mistaken he had been from a letter which Derby had written Granville in mid-December[3] and in addition he had had an interview with him in mid-January[4] and could now have had little hope of his accepting office. On the appearance of the National Press Agency statement Derby had written to Hartington setting out his views:

> . . . I do not believe any parliament meeting in Dublin can long go on without a quarrel with the imperial parliament at Westminster. Retain a veto on its acts and you have exactly the state of affairs which was found intolerable 100 years ago. Limit its functions, and every question taken out of its power . . . will be the beginning of a grievance. Its first act will probably be to declare itself the only body entitled to make laws for Ireland. . . Then what possible security can you give to the landlords? And how can you reconcile Ulster? . . . I had rather give the Irish at once what must follow from it - separate administration with only the Crown for a connecting link.[5]

Northbrook was offered the Lord Lieutenancy or the Privy Seal. He was by no means diametrically opposed to all forms

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1 Hartington to Granville, 8 Aug. 1885, P.R.O., 30.29.22A (Holland, II. 77).

2 Granville to Spencer, 14 Aug. 1885, Lord E.Fitzmaurice, The Life of Lord Granville, II. 459.

3 Derby to Granville, 15 Dec. 1885, Add.Mss.44142, f. 148; and Granville to Gladstone, 17 Dec. 1885, Add.Mss.44178, f.277.

4 Derby to Spencer, 15 Jan. 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp.

5 Derby to Hartington, 18 Dec. 1885, Chats. 340.1885.

of home rule, but refused to consider either post mainly because of the treatment which he had received in connection with his mission to Egypt in 1884.[1] In early February he wrote to a friend:

> . . . The position which Mr. Gladstone has taken upon the Irish question, coupled with the weakness shown by the late Government, has produced a state of circumstances under which it seems to be inevitable that we should see if any tolerable terms can be made with the Home Rulers; and I am not going into opposition to any such proposals. I shall wait and see what they are; but I am not sanguine that Mr. Gladstone will succeed. I feel sure he has a plan in his head.[2]

Courtney declined to take part in the new administration. He believed that home rule would injure Britain, but would well nigh ruin Ireland.[3] If he could have had his way he would have exerted all the authority of the Empire to ensure the rule of law in Ireland; have curbed the Nationalists' power for mischief in Westminster; have established free county government; have felt the way to provincial conferences; and have allowed Irish grand committees at Westminster.[4] But such a programme, he knew, would have to be steadily maintained and as that did not seem possible he was drawn to the conclusion that Ireland was "doomed

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1 Northbrook's diary, 3 Feb. 1886, B.Mallet, Thomas George, Earl of Northbrook, 228; and Northbrook to H.Grenfell, n.d., ibid., 229.

2 Northbrook to H.Grenfell [n.d. in Mallet, but was in answer to a letter dated 5 Feb. 1886], ibid. 229.

3 Courtney to Gladstone, 19 Dec. 1885, Add. Mss. 44493, f. 186; and Courtney to Miss Tod (draft), 30 Dec. 1885, Courtney, XIX, p.26.

4 Courtney to Gladstone, 19 Dec. 1885; and Courtney to Miss Tod, 30 Dec. 1885.

to go through the furnace of Home Rule."[1] Under such circumstances he had decided that his policy must be simply to resist home rule as long as possible.[2]

John Morley, who had never before held office, accepted the Irish Chief Secretaryship with a seat in the Cabinet. The appointment caused much comment and most people interpreted it as an earnest that Gladstone was determined on the production of a substantial home rule measure for, as Harcourt wrote to Gladstone, it would be "obviously impossible for Mr. Morley to deal with Mr. Parnell on any other footing than that of the opinions he has himself proclaimed".[3]

Granville, Gladstone's chief confidant in Irish as in other political matters, wished for an Irish legislature containing efficient safeguards for the landlords and the anti-Nationalist minority.[4] The great bribe for him, he stated, and he believed for the majority of the people of Great Britain, would be the exclusion of the Irish M.P.s from Westminster.[5] Granville's management of foreign affairs in the previous Liberal ministry has led his chief colleagues and also

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1 Courtney to Gladstone, 19 Dec. 1885.

2 Courtney to Miss Tod, 30 Dec. 1885.

3 Harcourt to Gladstone, 31 Jan. 1886, Add. Mss. 44200, f. 15 (Gardiner, I. 563-4).

4 Granville to Spencer, 20 Dec. 1885, Granville vol., Althorp; and Granville to Gladstone, 28 Dec. 1885, Add. Mss. 44178, f. 287.

5 Ibid., and Granville to Spencer, Granville vol., Althorp.

the Queen to fear that his powers were no longer equal to the task,[1] and so Gladstone now gave him the Colonial Office. The Foreign Office he gave to the young and able Rosebery. Rosebery held that powers of local self-government should not be withheld from Ireland when they had already been given to British colonies and would unhesitatingly be given to her if she were a thousand miles distant.[2] He further believed that the Liberal party had no alternative but to take up home rule as the Irish, now that they had discovered Gladstone's views from the Hawarden "Kite", would never consent to anything else and would otherwise have to be ruled by the sword.[3]

Harcourt accepted the Chancellorship of the Exchequer, but first he wrote to Gladstone setting out his views and the conditions under which he consented to office. The letter is of especial interest because of the contribution which it makes to an understanding of the key part which Harcourt took in the

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1 Lord Crewe, Lord Rosebery, I. 259-60; and P. Guedella, The Queen and Mr. Gladstone, II. 65.

2 Rosebery to Spencer, 31 Dec. 1885, Miscellaneous, Althorp.

3 Ibid.

reunion negotiations of the following winter.[1] He wrote :

> . . . I have not either from any reflection of my own or from the slight indications I have received of your views on th. subject been able to arrive at the conclusion that there is any probability of devising a scheme of "Home Rule" - by which I mean a plan involving a legislative body sitting in Ireland - which could fulfil the conditions laid down by you in the paper . . . If therefore your Government was about to be formed on the basis of the adoption of a separate legislative body in Ireland I could not conscientiously join it. But I understand from you that this is a question to be examined by the Cabinet with perfect freedom to every member of it to arrive at his own conclusions . . . I have from the first felt that your great influence and authority make your opinions and views on this subject so potent an element in dealing with the Irish problem that before having recourse to any other alternative every effort should be made to bring them forward for a fair trial.. . . I understand that nothing is to be done which should fetter the freedom of the Cabinet to accept or reject . . . a solution.. . .[2]

Campbell-Bannerman accepted the War Office. He regarded home rule as a dangerous and damaging pis aller,[3] but feared that

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1 On the same day as he wrote this letter Harcourt remarked to James "It will be best to let the scheme be brought forward, it will then be condemned and so got out of the way. We shall all come together then" (James' memoir, Lord Askwith, Lord James of Hereford, 165). And Garvin records (II. 492) that Harcourt in the following years often wondered whether he would have done better to have resigned with Chamberlain in March 1886. In a letter to his son, written when the O'Shea divorce suit appeared to have mortally stricken home rule, Harcourt remarked, "Like Grattan we can say, 'We sat by its cradle and we follow its hearse'. And I at least suffered as much from the pangs of its birth as I ever can from the agony of its decease" (Gardiner, II. 91).

2 Harcourt to Gladstone, 31 Jan. 1886, Add. Mss. 44200, f. 15 (Gardiner, I. 563-4).

3 Campbell-Bannerman to Spencer, 5 Jan. 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp.

there was no alternative to it.[1] He considered a separate parliament much less objectionable than the Irish Central Board proposed in the previous Liberal ministry,[2] but nevertheless admitted that it might ruin Ireland by driving out all capital and destroying her credit.[3] He had more reason to be embarrassed than most by the anti-home rule utterances which he had made during the general election.[4]

Ripon, who had favoured mild home rule as early as the preceding July,[5] became First Lord of the Admiralty and Childers,[6] who had declared for an Irish legislature in the general election, became Home Secretary. No indications are at present available of the private views on the Irish legislature question of the three remaining appointments to the Cabinet. They were, Kimberley to the India Office, Sir F.Herschell (created first Baron Herschell in 1886) to the Lord Chancellorship, and A.J.Mundella to the Board of Trade.

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1 Campbell-Bannerman to Northbrook, 26 Dec. 1885, J.A.Spender, The life of the right hon. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, I.92-95.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.; and Campbell-Bannerman to Spencer, 27 Dec. 1885, Miscellaneous, Althorp.

4 But it is only fair to record that Campbell-Bannerman had noted in a memorandum on the Central Board Scheme of the previous April, "I am personally not afraid of going great lengths - the length of something like a 'Grattan's Parliament', although there would be awkward difficulties of detail". (J.A.Spender, The life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, I. 84).

5 Lucian Wolf, Life of the First Marquess of Ripon, II. 175-9.

6 Childers' speech, 12 Oct. 1885, The Times, 13 Oct. 1885; Childers to Gladstone, 27 and 28 Sept. 1885, Add. Mss. 44132, ff. 183 and 186; and Lieut-Col. Spencer Childers, Life and correspondence of Hugh C.E.Childers, II. 232-4.

# CHAPTER II

## AN INTERLUDE

One of the first acts of the new cabinet was to commission Chamberlain to prepare a local government bill. He was given no instructions about details[1] and, with assistance from Dilke,[2] he developed a scheme very much to his heart's desire. County councils, district councils, and parish councils were planned with powers to regulate licensing, to purchase land for allotments, and to administer local charities.[3] However, because of Chamberlain's subsequent resignation the measure was fated not even to reach the cabinet table.

On 8 February Gladstone asked Chamberlain for a discussion on Ireland.[4] The meeting took place at Downing Street five days later[5] and must have resulted chiefly in demonstrating to Gladstone how futile would be any attempt to reconcile Chamberlain's views with his own. Chamberlain once more urged the same plan as he had done when, a fortnight earlier, he had been asked to take office : "deal first with the Irish land

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1 Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 193.

2 Dilke's memoir, Gwynn and Tuckwell, II. 210.

3 Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 193.

4 Gladstone to Chamberlain (draft), 8 Feb. 1886, Add. Mss. 44126, f. 146.

5 Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 189.

question, and then with education and municipal and county government, leaving anything more entirely for future consideration".[1] One wonders what Gladstone said in reply for, strange to say, Chamberlain left with the impression that he had moved closer to him. Two days later he wrote to Labouchere:

> . . . As regards our future policy I can say nothing at present, but I think that a closer inspection of the difficulties in the way has brought Mr. Gladstone nearer to me than he was when he first came to London. If Parnell is impracticable my hope is that we may all agree to give way to the Tories and let them do the coercion which will be necessary.[2]

Gladstone, understandably enough, made no further attempt to discuss Irish policy with Chamberlain, but with the co-operation of Parnell through Morley[3] went forward with the development of two vast schemes - one for the creation of an Irish Parliament and the other for the buying out of Irish landlords. Gladstone feared and distrusted Chamberlain. He asked Harcourt to discover, if possible, Chamberlain's real intentions and even had a meeting of Morley, Spencer and Granville to consider how far it would be wise to reveal the schemes to him.[4] The realization that he was to have no part in the "inquiry" probably hardened and clarified Chamberlain's

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1 Ibid., 190.

2 Chamberlain to Labouchere, 15 Feb. 1886, A.L.Thorold, The life of Henry Labouchere, 288-9.

3 Morley, III.304; Viscount Morley, Recollections, II. 221; Morley-Gladstone correspondence, Add.Mss.44259; and Gladstone's memorandum, 18 March 1886, Add.Mss.44772, f.4.

4 J.L.Hammond, Gladstone and the Irish nation, 403.

resolution. On 8 March he wrote to his brother Arthur :

> . . . As regards Ireland I have quite made up my mind - indeed I have never felt the slightest hesitation. If Mr. Gladstone's scheme goes too far as I expect it will I shall leave him. The immediate result will be considerable unpopularity and temporary estrangement from the Radical party . . . I shall be left almost alone for a time. I cannot, of course, work with the Tories, and Hartington is quite as much hostile to my Radical views as to Mr. Gladstone's Irish plans. . . .[1]

The Conservatives, freed from all prospect of Parnellite support, began straight-forward campaigning against home rule. On 22 February Churchill crossed to Ulster and received an enthusiastic welcome. In Belfast he was given a march past by, it was estimated, 70,000 people.[2] In a militant speech to a packed audience he said that, should the home rule storm not blow over, the struggle was not likely to be restricted to constitutional action - the history of the United States taught a different lesson - and urged the Ulstermen to stand firm, assuring them that men of influence and position in England would throw in their lot with them.[3]

The episode helped to draw attention to the strength of unionist feeling in Ulster, a factor which was very imperfectly appreciated in Great Britain, and the riots which followed on his visit, while being no credit to Belfast unionism, gave a

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1 Chamberlain to A.Chamberlain, 8 March 1886, q.w.o., Garvin, II. 185.

2 Churchill, II. 61.

3 The Times, 23 Feb. 1886.

hint of the civil strife which would be launched by the passing of a home rule measure.

Of all the people in the British Isles the Irish Liberals had been the most persistent in refusing to believe that Gladstone could contemplate home rule.[1] Not until the appointment of Morley to the Chief Secretaryship and the refusal of office by so many Liberal leaders did their faith in the unionism of Gladstone begin to falter. By the time of Churchill's visit it was very shaky indeed. A direct outcome of that event was that the Ulster Liberal leaders decided that, be Gladstone's intention as it may, the time had come for a statement of their attitude to home rule[2] and at a meeting in the Belfast Reform Club on 24 February they decided to call a convention of the province for that purpose.[3] The convention met on 15 March. Some seven hundred representatives were present, a number of whom were Roman Catholic Liberals. The main business was a resolution which passed with an overwhelming majority. The resolution, after expressing confidence in the patriotism and statesmanship of Gladstone and gratitude for his past services to Ireland, urged Irish land legislation, the grant of local government to Ireland, abolition of the Viceroyalty, appointment of an Irish secretary,

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1 The Ulster Liberal Unionist Association. A sketch of its history, 1885-1914, 13-14; T.Macknight, Ulster as it is, II. 122; and Richard Patterson, "Mercantile Ireland versus home rule", National Review, Jan. 1888.

2 The Ulster Liberal Unionist Association. . . . 1885-1914, 14.

3 Ibid.

reform of the Irish administration and a greater share in it for Irishmen. On home rule it stated :

> . . . we declare our determined opposition to the establishment of a separate Irish Parliament as certain to result in disastrous collision between sections of people holding conflicting views upon social, economic, and religious subjects, and likely to create such a feeling as would jeopardise industrial and commercial pursuits . . .[1]

A counter resolution expressing complete confidence in Gladstone was heavily defeated.[2] It was supported mainly by Roman Catholic Liberals.[3] Finally a committee was appointed with the task of pressing the views of the convention where they would be most effective.[4] The chief action of the committee was to send to London a deputation which interviewed Hartington, Chamberlain, Goschen, Trevelyan, Smith, the Duke of Abercorn and other influential persons.[5] This convention and committee was the first step by unionist Liberals anywhere towards organised resistance to home rule and was the seed which was to develop into the influential Ulster Liberal Unionist Association.

As can be seen from the resolution passed at the conference, the Irish Liberals belonged to the Radical wing of the party.

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1 Northern Whig, 16 March 1886.

2 Ibid.

3 The Ulster Liberal Unionist Association. . . . 1885-1914, 16

4 Northern Whig, 16 March 1886.

5 The Ulster Liberal Unionist Association. . . . 1885-1914, 16.

They had their main support among the Protestant, and especially the Presbyterian, tenant farmers, and among the middle, and the Protestant artizan classes of the towns. The farm workers[1] and the working classes of the towns were as a rule either Nationalist or Conservative.

The Conservatives were not slow to see the value of an alliance with the unionist Liberals and soon they were throwing out suggestions for an understanding between the two groups. However, even the staunchest of right wing Liberals (e.g. Goschen[2]) had no desire for such an experiment and, if anything, the unionist Liberals took trouble to underline their Liberalism by attacking the Conservatives whenever an opportunity presented itself. It was sound tactics, but was little liked by the Conservatives, who neither then nor later fully appreciated their difficult and complex position. In addition the unionist Liberals had not forgiven the Conservatives for their flirtations with the Parnellites and the attitude, which the Duke of St. Albans expressed in a letter on 12 February, was shared by many :

> . . . I do not think the Liberals can touch Parnell without being defiled but I look with such contempt on the Tory tactics that I shall be sorry if I am ever forced to give my vote and any influence I may have against a Liberal Government and as I told Mr. Gladstone I shall support his Government till it becomes a question of Home Rule . . .[3]

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1 Prof. T.W.Moody, "A general survey", Ulster since 1800, 123 (refers only to Ulster farm workers).

2 E.P.Bouverie to Hartington, 22 March 1886, Chats.340.1951.

3 Duke of St. Albans to Granville, 12 Feb. 1886, P.R.O., 30.29.22A.

The first important move in public for an alliance was made by Churchill, with Salisbury's consent,[1] when he spoke at Manchester on 3 March. Addressing himself to the unionist Liberals he offered the most generous Conservative co-operation. "If you like to form a government yourselves, we will support you", he said. "If, on the other hand, you wish for our personal co-operation in that government we will give it you. If there are persons to whom you object and with whom you do not wish to serve, those persons will stand aside cheerfully". He then suggested the formation of a new political party which would combine all that was "best of the politics of the Tory, the Whig or the Liberal" and which might be known as the party of the Union.[2] The speech was based on a superficial understanding of the dissentients' problems and the suggestions which Churchill threw out had no chance of being taken up.

On the same day as Churchill's speech Salisbury took a more down to earth step. He knew Hartington only slightly,[3] but, using as a pretext an attack on the Conservatives by James, he asked him for a talk.[4] Hartington called on Salisbury and the two discussed co-operation for about an hour.[5] The

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1 Churchill, II. 70.

2 The Times, 4 March 1886.

3 Cecil, III. 295.

4 Salisbury to Goschen, 4 March 1886, Cecil, III.295.

5 Ibid.

conclusion reached was that there seemed to be no obstacle to their acting together to resist home rule, but that further co-operation was "not within the field of practical politics at present."[1] Salisbury was disappointed. "It was said of the Peelites of 1850", he wrote to Churchill almost a fortnight later, "that they were always putting themselves up to auction and always buying themselves in. That seems to me the Whig idea at present. I do not think that it is necessary to make any more advances to them. The next steps must come from them."[2]

On 13 March the Cabinet met to learn the nature of the land purchase bill and were startled to find that it provided for the advancement of up to a maximum of £120,000,000 on credit to the Irish tenants. This was firm ground at last and Chamberlain prepared for action. First he wisely took care to widen the battle front to include the home rule scheme.

> . . . it was impossible, he contended, to judge this scheme fairly without knowing what were to be the provisions of the Home Rule Bill which was to accompany it . . . if British money was to be advanced, it was important to know whether the advance was to be made to a part of the United Kingdom under full control of Parliament or to what might turn out to be a practically independent nation.[3]

After considerable discussion and some hesitation[4] Gladstone

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1 Ibid., and Sir H.James' diary, 4 March 1886, Lord Askwith, Lord James of Hereford, 171.

2 Salisbury to Churchill, 16 March 1886, Churchill, II. 73.

3 Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 193-4.

4 Ibid.

stated that he planned a separate parliament with full powers to deal with all Irish affairs, which would include customs and the civil forces, but with no control over the army and navy or over foreign and colonial policy.[1] Chamberlain reasoned strongly against the proposal and also severely criticised the details of the land purchase scheme.[2] Gladstone, nevertheless, refused to give an assurance of any important alteration and in consequence Chamberlain stated that he would have to leave the Government.[3]

Two days later Chamberlain sent in his official resignation. In it he set out the reasons for his action:

> . . . This [land purchase] scheme while contemplating only a trifling reduction of the Judicial rents fixed before the recent fall in prices would commit the British taxpayer to tremendous obligations,[4] accompanied in my opinion with serious risk of ultimate loss.
>
> . . . a new Irish elective authority . . . would . . . be at once the landlords and the delegates of the Irish tenants. I fear that . . . the tenants, unable or unwilling to pay the rents demanded, would speedily elect an authority pledged to give them relief and to seek to recoup itself by an early repudiation of what would be described as the English Tribute. . . .
>
> I gathered from your statements that although your plans are not finally matured, yet that you have come to the conclusion that any extension of local government on

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1 Chamberlain to Gladstone, 15 March 1886, Add.Mss.44126, f.154 (Chamberlain, 194-6; and q.w.o., Garvin, II. 187).

2 Chamberlain's memoir, 194.

3 Ibid.

4 An interesting sidelight on this remark was that in February Chamberlain had pressed on Rosebery a scheme of Chinese railway construction which he reckoned would require loans of £500,000,000 spread over twenty years. (Garvin, II. 448-9).

> municipal lines, including even the creation of a National Council or councils for purely Irish business, would now be entirely inadequate; and that you are convinced of the necessity for conceding a separate Legislative Assembly for Ireland with full powers to deal with all Irish affairs. I understood that you would exclude from their competence the control of the Army and Navy and the direction of Foreign and Colonial policy but that you would allow them to arrange their own Customs Tariff, to have entire control of the Civil Forces of the country, and even if they thought fit to establish a Volunteer Army.
>
> It appears to me that a proposal of this kind must be regarded as tantamount to a proposal for separation.
>
> I think it is even worse, because it would set up an unstable and temporary Government which would be a source of perpetual irritation and agitation until the full demands of the Nationalist Party were conceded.
>
> The Irish Parliament would be called upon to pay three or four millions a year as its contribution to the National Debt and the Army and Navy, and it would be required in addition to pay nearly five millions a year . . . on the cost of Irish land. These charges would be felt to be so heavy a burden on a poor country that . . . the due fulfilment of their obligations by the new Irish authority could only be enforced by military intervention . . .[1]

Trevelyan liked the proposed bills no better than did Chamberlain and resigned along with him.[2] Gladstone wrote objecting that they were resigning not on his plans, about which they had incomplete information, but on his ideas and requested that the resignations be deferred at least until the proposals should be ready for the Cabinet.[3] To this both men consented.[4]

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1 Chamberlain to Gladstone, 15 March 1886, Add.Mss.44126, f.154 (Chamberlain, 194-6; and q.w.o., Garvin, II. 187).

2 Trevelyan to Gladstone, 15 March 1886, Add.Mss.44335, f.199.

3 Gladstone to Chamberlain (draft), 15 March 1886, Add.Mss.44126, f.160 (Chamberlain 197); and Gladstone to Trevelyan (draft), 15 March 1886, Add.Mss.44335, f.201.

4 Chamberlain to Gladstone, 16 March 1886, Add.Mss.44126, f.162 (Chamberlain, 197-8); and Trevelyan to Gladstone, 15 March 1886, Add.Mss.44335, f. 203.

Gladstone asked Harcourt and Spencer to mediate. (He made the request to Spencer through Granville[1]). Spencer replied that he would have a talk with Chamberlain if an opportunity should occur naturally, but that he feared it would be of no use. What might be of use, he suggested, would be if Gladstone should himself see Chamberlain and take him as far as possible into his confidence for part of the difficulty, he believed, was that Chamberlain thought Gladstone did not sufficiently value him. "I know the difficulties about consulting him", Spencer significantly remarked, but added that he thought the attempt at reconciliation should none the less be made.[2]

Harcourt had talks with both Chamberlain and Trevelyan,[3] but with no practical result. Chamberlain again explained his objections to the bills and declined to discuss an Irish settlement other than a federal system similar to that of the United States.[4] Nevertheless Harcourt, in sending Gladstone an account of their conversation, urged him to see Chamberlain.[5] Gladstone replied that he was quite willing to see Chamberlain to offer to reduce the land purchase sum from 120 millions to

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1 Spencer to Granville, 17 March 1886, P.R.O., 30.29.22A.

2 Ibid.

3 Harcourt to Gladstone, 20 March 1886, Add.Mss.44200, f. 96.

4 Gardiner, I. 577.

5 Ibid.

60 millions, but added that it was not possible to work a Cabinet on the basis of universal discussion without purpose - at any rate at seventy-seven.[1] The suggested halving of the land purchase sum was undoubtedly a major concession, but that it was accompanied by no suggestion of any alteration in the home rule bill made it useless for retaining Chamberlain in the Government.

Chamberlain recognising that Gladstone was not going to meet his main objections to the home rule bill and knowing the gulf which separated their Irish views seems to have abandoned hope of a compromise and to have begun to contemplate a fight to the death. On, or perhaps a day or two before, 22 March he called with Hartington and had with him a surprising discussion. Afterwards Hartington discussed the event with James and we are indebted to James' diary for an account.[2] Chamberlain urged Hartington, the diary says, to undertake to form a government should Gladstone be defeated or resign and made clear that he would be very willing to become a member. He then endeavoured to persuade Hartington that they did not differ materially in political opinion. Also he gave Hartington a memorandum sketching an Irish policy which he held could well be supported. James, to whom Hartington showed the document, wrote of it :

> . . . apparently it substantially embodied Mr. Gl.'s views except (1) that the landlords were to be bought out by

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1 Gladstone to Harcourt (draft), 20 March 1886, Add.Mss.44548, p. 124.

2 Sir H. James' diary, 22 March 1886, Lord Askwith, Lord James of Hereford, 172.

> payment in "Irish consols"; (2) that two councils or parliaments were to be established, one at Dublin and one at Belfast (and "two" was queried in the document); (3) that the powers of such councils or parliaments were to be defined and restricted to affairs of a comparatively local character; (4) that an Irish representation in the Imperial Parliament was to continue, subject to a diminution in the numbers of Irish members so as to be in proportion to the population.[1]

At the cabinet held on 26 March Gladstone said that he was ready to explain something of his Irish government scheme and that he thought the best way to clear up or define differences would be by a resolution in favour of a legislature in Dublin with power over purely Irish affairs.[2] Chamberlain said that the suggestion was too vague and asked for information on four key points. As a result Gladstone stated that his plan removed the Irish members from Westminster; gave taxation, including customs and excise to the Irish Parliament as well as the appointment of judges and magistrates; and allowed the Irish parliament authority in all matters except certain ones enumerated in the bill.[3] Chamberlain was opposed to all of these[4] and Trevelyan could not agree to the giving over of police and the judicial system.[5] Gladstone, however, made little attempt to be conciliatory or to retain Chamberlain and Trevelyan when they verbally resigned and left

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 198.

[3] Ibid., 198-9; Morley, III. 302; and Hansard, ccciv, col. 119(

[4] Gladstone to the Queen, 26 March 1886, Letters of Queen Victoria, 3rd Series, I. 91-92; and Hansard, ccciv, col. 1190.

[5] Gladstone to the Queen, 26 March 1886; and Hansard, ccciv, col. 1116.

the room.[1] Some who were present thought that Gladstone was at fault in this,[2] but his attitude is understandable when one remembers Chamberlain's broad based letter of resignation of the 15th and his uncompromising attitude when approached by Harcourt. Nevertheless, the main factor with Gladstone may well have been an intense dislike of Chamberlain. Afterwards he told Rosebery that nothing which had happened since the formation of the Government had given him satisfaction comparable with that of Chamberlain's resignation.[3] "With men like most of my colleagues it is safe to go to an extreme of concession", Gladstone was to write to his chief whip a month later. "But my experience in Chamberlain's case is that such concession is treated mainly as an acknowledgment of his superior greatness and wisdom, and as a fresh point of departure accordingly".[4] It is also possible that Gladstone very seriously underestimated the following which Chamberlain would take with him. Two days earlier Herbert Gladstone reckoned that if Chamberlain, Hartington and James were against home rule forty-five members would secede, but that if land purchase

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1 Note by Morley on conversation with Rosebery and Chamberlain in 1892, Viscount Morley, Recollections, I. 296; Morley, III.303; and Gardiner, I. 577.

2 Morley, III. 303; and Chamberlain's occasional diary, 22 May 1888, and 30 June 1894, Garvin, II. 196.

3 Sir Philip Magnus, Gladstone. A biography, 348. (Sir Philip Magnus may have obtained this information from the diary of Sir Edward Hamilton (B.M.) which is closed to ordinary inspection until 1956).

4 Gladstone to A.Morley (draft), 20 April 1886, Add.Mss. 44548, p. 146.

came first and was pushed to the fore the seceders would number sixty or seventy with many abstentions.[1] Chamberlain maintained afterwards that he went to the cabinet wishing to be conciliatory,[2] but judging from his ideas and temperament it seems improbable that Gladstone could have retained him for more than a few days except by a drastic and fundamental recasting of the bills.

Stansfeld and Dalhousie took the posts left vacant by Chamberlain and Trevelyan, but Stansfeld alone was given a seat in the Cabinet. Before accepting, Stansfeld wrote warning Gladstone that he felt the exclusion of Irish representatives from Westminster would place Ireland in the position of a colony or dependency, but with charges and restrictions to which Britain's other dependencies were not subject; that he believed the Protestant part of Ulster should not be compelled, nor the slightest risk run of having to use force against it; and that he could see no guarantee that the land purchase act would be honestly enforced by law.[3]

Salisbury in the last days of March was of the opinion that an early dissolution with Gladstone in power and upon home rule would be the event most profitable to the

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1 Herbert Gladstone to Primrose (draft), 24 March 1886, Add.Mss.46036, f. 70.

2 Viscount Morley, Recollections, I. 218; note by Morley on conversation with Rosebery and Chamberlain in 1892, ibid., I. 296; Morley, III. 303; and Garvin, II. 193.

3 Stansfeld to Gladstone, 26 March 1886, Add.Mss.44496, f. 44.

Conservatives.[1] A coalition to include Hartington, Chamberlain and Trevelyan, he had decided, was impossible and a dissolution by a "caretaker" Conservative government hazardous as it would enable both the Whigs and the Radicals to fight the election, not on home rule, but on some other question which would be certain to arise.[2] Surprisingly enough, Salisbury, even at this late hour, held that home rule would raise no popular stirring and that the Conservative gain would be in the splitting up of their opponents.[3]

Perhaps as a result of these opinions Salisbury decided on a further attempt to draw Moderate Liberals and Conservatives together. On 5 April he wrote to Hartington proposing to call with him to discuss the situation.[4] The meeting took place at Devonshire House,[5] but no record is available of the subjects dealt with or of the conclusions reached. Nevertheless, the event is noteworthy in that it established the practice of direct personal communication between the two leaders, which, especially as mutual confidence became more complete, was to be of considerable importance. Although Hartington was in the

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1 Cecil, III. 298; and Salisbury to Churchill, 31 March 1886, q.v.o., Churchill, II. 73-74.

2 Salisbury to Churchill, 31 March 1886.

3 Ibid.

4 Salisbury to Hartington, 5 April 1886, Chats. 340. 1961.

5 Cecil, III. 299.

Commons, it became his custom, even in such matters as debate tactics, to deal directly with Salisbury.[1] The practice undoubtedly resulted in smoother co-operation between the two parties and Salisbury attached much importance to it.[2] Unfortunately for historians, it is also the cause of a dearth of manuscript material where sometimes it would be valuable.

Churchill retained his Manchester enthusiasm for Liberal co-operation and early in April succeeded in inducing Salisbury and Chamberlain to meet.[3] The only information available about the event is that Salisbury went to it "not . . . without trepidations and misgivings" and that it took place in a little dingy room at the Turf Club.[4] Churchill's biographer adds that it began "that strange alliance afterwards so powerfully to affect the course of history",[5] but such a rhetorical exaggeration reveals nothing. A few days earlier Salisbury had agreed with Balfour that the Chamberlainites would be more satisfactory allies than the Whips "so long as you can work with them",[6] but even so, one doubts if the Salisbury-

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1 Ibid., and Chatsworth papers, passim.

2 The Earl of Midleton has recorded how in his presence Salisbury once asked the name of a certain card game. On being told that it was "bridge" he remarked, "I had better inspect it; it may bring me into closer touch with Devonshire". (Earl of Midleton, "Politics and the statesmen, 1882-1932:" an article in a series reprinted from The Times under the title Fifty Years, 1882-1932).

3 Churchill, II. 80.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Salisbury to Balfour, 29 March 1886, E.C.Dugdale, Arthur James Balfour, I. 101-2, and Cecil, III. 297.

Chamberlain meeting can have resulted in more than afriendly exchange of views.

From the formation of Gladstone's third ministry to the introduction of the bills was an exceptionally difficult time for unionist Liberals. No one quite knew what was happening, or what to expect, or even whom they could trust among those they hoped were their leaders. Many even doubted whether Hartington would really oppose Gladstone and dissidents had to be informed personally and in confidence that he was on their side.[1] Not until Hartington spoke against the actual bill on 9 April was the doubt finally dispelled. Also the belief stubbornly persisted that Gladstone would produce something so mild or so well safeguarded that almost every Liberal would be able to support him.

The Goschenites were eager to take the field at once,[2] but Hartington thought otherwise. On 5 March he stated his position at an Eighty Club dinner. It did not differ greatly from when he had refused office.

> . . . The people of this country, he said, must know what the scheme is. They must be able to bring their judgment to bear on the question whether it presents dangers and risks which they cannot bring themselves to face, or whether it presents so little hope that they are unwilling to face those risks. They must know whether the scheme is one which will, or can, be accepted by Mr. Parnell.. . . For these reasons, although I have not been able to be a party to this policy of examination and inquiry, I have

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1 The Milner papers (Edited by C.Headlam), I.21.

2 Elliot, II. 34.

done nothing to put any obstacles in the way. I will not be a party to any attempt to prejudge the policy of the Government by agitation of a political or sectarian character.[1]

Nevertheless, Hartington was fully aware of the nature of the struggle which must follow the introduction of the bills, and was not adverse to quiet preparation. On 8 March he wrote to John Bright asking for a talk with him and added that he thought all who were in an independent position and disapproved of the course which the Government was likely to take ought to come to an understanding.[2] At the end of March he tried to gain the co-operation of Chamberlain. He wrote asking him to call for a discussion and also to attend a small meeting of Liberals which was to be held a few days later.[3] Chamberlain declined both invitations.[4] He could, he said, give "most help by barking separately for the present".[5]

On 2 April the first meeting of any importance at which Liberals and Conservatives appeared together took place at the London Guildhall. The Mayor presided and thirteen members of Parliament were present, including the two Liberals Sir J.Lubbock (London University) and M. Biddulph (S.

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1 The Times, 6 March 1886.

2 Hartington to Bright, 8 March 1886, Add.Mss.43386, f. 19.

3 Chamberlain to Hartington, 1 and 3 April 1886, Chats. 340. 1960 and 340. 1958.

4 Ibid.

5 Chamberlain to Hartington, 1 April, 1886.

Herefordshire).[1] The meeting aroused wide interest but as the handful of Liberals who were present had attended on their own initiative and without encouragement from any leader no consternation was aroused such as was to follow the meeting at the Queen's Opera House twelve days later.

On 6 April unionist Liberals were encouraged by the return of W.S.Caine at the Barrow bye-election and by a circular of the National Liberal Federation. W.S.Caine, a radical, had made plain that he opposed home rule of the kind which it was assumed Gladstone would advocate[2] and yet was returned by a majority of almost one thousand.[3] The Devonshire family owned a very large amount of property and had much influence in Barrow but the significance of this fact was much reduced by the radicalism of Caine and the secret ballot. The circular was issued to the local associations and asked them to consider carefully the Government's scheme for Ireland so that the real opinion of the constituencies might be known. This cool, independent attitude seemed to indicate that the Caucus was going to support Chamberlain and not Gladstone.

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1 The Times, 3 April 1886.

2 Caine had stated in his election address that he was prepared to support self-government for Ireland provided it were of a type which could be extended to the rest of the British Isles.

3 The Times, 7 April 1886.

# CHAPTER III

## THE LIBERALS IN THE COMMONS DIVIDE

On 8 April Gladstone revealed his Government of Ireland Bill amid an intensity of interest almost without parallel. In the House of Commons every seat had been marked before noon, and, even when the space between the mace and the bar had been filled with chairs, a number of members were still not seated. One Nationalist member (D.Sullivan) was said to have arrived at half past five in the morning and nearly all of the Nationalists had arrived by half-past eight.[1] Admission to the visitors' galleries was a highly sought privilege for which offers of a thousand pounds were made in vain.[2] Amongst those in the galleries were some of royal blood and many ambassadors and peers. Crowds had assembled in Downing Street and the approaches to the House of Commons as early as half-past one.[3] A little before two o'clock Big Ben stopped and many noted the incident as an evil omen.[4] About half-past three a steady rain began[5] and, a few minutes before Gladstone left 10 Downing Street, one

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1 Standard, 9 April 1886, p. 5.

2 Garvin, II, 202.

3 The Times, 9 April 1886, p. 9.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

of the heaviest showers of the season broke.[1] In Ireland excitement was at fever pitch, and in Ulster, where thoughts were turning to armed resistance, even morning papers published editions at intervals as Gladstone's speech was being transmitted.[2]

The following were the main provisions of the Government of Ireland Bill. The Irish legislature was to consist of two orders which were to sit together in a single chamber and were to vote together unless a majority of one of them should have previously asked for a separate vote. The first order was to consist of seventy-five representatives elected for ten years by £25 occupiers or owners of £4,000 of capital, plus the twenty-eight Irish representative peers, who, however, were to be replaced at the end of thirty years by elected representatives. One half of the elected representatives were to retire at the end of each five years, but could stand again. The Irish representative peers were no longer to sit in the House of Lords. The second order was to consist of two hundred and four members, elected on the existing franchise and for the existing constituencies, with an additional two members for the Royal University should the Irish legislature so decide. The Irish M.Ps were to become members of the second order without having to stand in the first election. The rules governing the dissolution of

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1 Ibid.

2 Daily Telegraph, 9 April 1886, p. 5; and F.Macknight, Ulster as it is, II. 127.

the second order were to be similar to those of the House of Commons except that the life of a "parliament" was to be limited to five years. Either order could veto a measure for three years, or until the next dissolution of the legislature should that be longer than three years. The Lord Lieutenant was to become a permanent representative of the Crown, and could be of any religious denomination. He was to have the right to exercise the royal veto on any act of the Irish legislature. Ireland was to be represented in the Imperial Parliament only on such occasions as the Government of Ireland Act should be up for revision. Nevertheless, she was to contribute annually to the Imperial Treasury one fifteenth of the normal army, navy, and imperial civil expenditures, and one fifteenth of the National Debt as it then stood, plus a sinking fund of £360,000. The Imperial Government was to retain sole responsibility for the imposition and collection of customs and excise-customs. The Irish legislature was to have power to legislate on any matter not specifically reserved from it in the Act. The chief of these reserved matters were, issues affecting the Crown, the making of peace or war, the military forces, foreign and colonial relations, dignities and titles of honour, treason, trade and navigation, currency, and the post office. The Irish legislature was prohibited from establishing, endowing, or penalising any religion; from imposing any disability, or conferring any privilege on account of religious belief; and from curtailing the right to establish, or maintain denominational schools, or

denominational institutions or charities. The Irish administration was to appoint and pay the judges, who were to be removable only for misconduct, and the final court of appeal was to be the judicial committee of the Privy Council. The judicial committee of the Privy Council was also to be the final authority on whether a matter was within the competence of the Irish legislature. The Lord Lieutenant was to retain control of the Dublin police for two years and of the Royal Irish Constabulary for an unspecified period.[1] Special arrangements were made for judges, police, and civil servants who might fear victimisation under the new regime because of past services to the Imperial Government. In his speech Gladstone stated that, although no provision for the special treatment of Ulster had been included in the bill, he was willing to give the most favourable consideration to any such proposal, provided it should be generally recommended.[2] Also, he warned that the Government of Ireland Bill was closely and inseparably connected with the land purchase bill which had still to be introduced to Parliament.[3]

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1 Gladstone told Rendel in Nov. 1890 that Parnell in 1886 had wanted the constabulary left under Imperial control for the sake of his own personal security. (Lord Rendel's diary, 29 Nov. 1890, Lord Rendel, Personal papers, conversations with Mr. Gladstone, 1838-98, 79).

2 Hansard, vol. cccix, cols. 1052-4.

3 Ibid., vol. cccix, col. 1037.

The Times wrote that the bill made the separation of Ireland complete and absolute in principle, and that the restrictions to secure the supremacy of the Imperial parliament and to guard against abuses by the Irish legislature were worthless as they had no efficient sanction behind them. It added that such a plan might have been worth considering if a community such as a colony animated with loyalty to the mother country were being dealt with, but that Ireland was no such community.[1] The Daily Telegraph declared that the scheme would turn Ireland into a colony, but that unlike a colony she would have to pay her share of the National Debt and of Britain's imperial expenditure, and would be subject to important restrictions which were not imposed on the colonies. It pointed out that the scheme was hedged with restrictions and special provisions, each based on distrust of the Irish as legislators. "We are in fact," it remarked, "to play the part of Frankenstein, and then tie up carefully with red-tape the monster we have made." The good part of the bill, it considered, was that the exclusion of the Irish members would enable the Imperial Parliament to legislate with freedom and vigour.[2] The Standard was of the opinion that Ireland would be given a colonial status, with restrictions and obligations which would be extremely irksome and offensive to the Irish, and of trivial value from the imperial point of view. The

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1 The Times, 9 April 1886, p. 9.

2 Daily Telegraph, 9 April 1886, p. 4.

absence of any special provision for Ulster, it stated, was the first thing which condemned the bill.[1] The Daily News, although it did not openly criticise the bill, showed no enthusiasm for its provisions. It wrote that the best and most patriotic action which the House of Commons could take would be to lay aside partisan feeling and to endeavour to perfect Gladstone's scheme in the interests of Ireland and the Empire.[2] The Manchester Guardian was openly hostile. It complained that this was not home rule as ordinarily understood, but was substantially a repeal of the legislative union. The bill, it asserted, would destroy the common parliament and establish in its place two entirely separate parliaments with the Crown as the only link between them. It insisted that to be acceptable a scheme would have to retain at least a portion of the Irish members at Westminster. If Ireland were substantially self-governed and contented Great Britain would be none the worse off for a few Irishmen in Parliament, it wrote, and, if she were not contented, it would be better to fight the matter out at Westminster than by sterner methods in another field.[3] The Birmingham Daily Post's immediate reaction was that the scheme might be made to work if

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1 Standard, 9 April 1886, p. 5.

2 Daily News, 9 April 1886, p. 5.

3 Manchester Guardian, 9 April 1886, p. 5.

largely amended.[1] However, by the following day its attitude had altered and it wrote that the bill provided for separation - and separation so arranged that it must result in dissentions, and ultimately in a bitter and dangerous conflict.[2] The exclusion of Irish representation from the Imperial Parliament, the formation of two orders with mutually destructive rights of veto, and the fixed contribution to imperial expenditure were the provisions to which it especially objected.[3] The Scotsman admitted that the bill had admirable features,but hastened to add that, even if all else were good, the exclusion of the Irish representatives must be fatal to it. Gladstone, it asserted, had given far more than was required; that in short he had been asked for home rule and was going to give repeal.[4] The Glasgow Herald considered that Gladstone had attempted the impossible in trying to reconcile Irish legislative independence and imperial unity, and that his efforts showed the danger of giving way, even an inch, on the home rule question.[5] The Northern Whig wrote that it was opposed to a separate legislature of any type. It held that

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[1] Birmingham Daily Post, 9 April 1886, p. 4.

[2] Ibid., 10 April 1886, p. 4.

[3] Ibid., 9 April 1886, p. 4.

[4] Scotsman, 9 April 1886, p. 4.

[5] Glasgow Herald, 9 April 1886, p. 6.

to remove the Irish members from the Imperial Parliament must result in the practical separation of Ireland from Great Britain; while to create an Irish legislature, and at the same time to give Irish representatives the opportunity to obstruct Westminster in order to gain further concessions would be absurd, indefensible, and preposterous.[1] The Christian World feared that Parnell aimed at complete independence and would use the bill towards that end.[2] The Guardian condemned the measure as an attempt to dismember the United Kingdom, and as a sacrifice of national interests to party necessities.[3] The Methodist Times warmly welcomed the bill[4] and became one of its most whole-hearted partisans. The Methodist Recorder wrote that the bill pleased few except Parnell's followers, and pleased them only because it provided the best means of reaching their ulterior ends. It denounced the exclusion of Irish representation from the Imperial Parliament and the leaving of Ulster to the fanciful working of the two orders.[5] The Nonconformist and Independent approved the bill and pointed out that the doubt and hesitation with which it had been received was to be

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1 Northern Whig, 9 April 1886, p. 4.

2 Christian World, 15 April 1886, p. 306.

3 Guardian, 14 April 1886, p. 525.

4 Methodist Times, 15 April 1886.

5 Methodist Recorder, 16 April 1886, p. 252.

expected as the public mind had been totally unprepared for it.[1] The Inquirer admitted that home rule was inevitable, but held that Gladstone's scheme would place Ireland in much the same position as the American colonies before the Declaration of Independence.[2] The Christian Life wrote that it was simply impossible that such a bill could be agreed to.[3] The Baptist confined itself to remarking that the bill seemed to tend in the direction of separation.[4] The Freeman, the other Baptist paper, did not even commit itself to that extent, but published two articles, one supporting and the other condemning the measure.[5] However, shortly afterwards it became a firm advocate of the bill.

Trevelyan explained his resignation from the Scottish Secretaryship on the same evening as Gladstone introduced the Government of Ireland Bill. He said that when asked to join the administration he had felt that to have refused would have been an admission that the Liberal party was a home rule party. Most of the Cabinet had at one time or another stated their opposition to home rule and he had assumed that they would "knock the measure about in the Cabinet as Cabinets do,

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1 Nonconformist and Independent, 15 April 1886, p. 355.

2 Inquirer, 17 April 1886, p. 248.

3 Christian Life, 10 April 1886, p. 174.

4 Baptist, 16 April 1886, p. 243.

5 Freeman, 16 April 1886, p. 251.

and mould it into accord with what had been our relative opinions, and which are mine now." He strongly attacked the Government of Ireland Bill and especially the provisions which handed over police and justice to the Irish parliament and arranged for a permanent "English tribute." The land purchase bill he condemned because he believed that in the long run the only security for the money advanced would be the unlikely willingness of the Irish farmers to pay their annuities. He objected because landlords were singled out for compensation and all other creditors ignored. In conclusion he advocated that home rule should take the form of freely elected local bodies responsible for education, the superintendence of local government, poor relief and the development of the recources of Ireland. These bodies were to have powers of local taxation, but the maintenance of law and order was to be the responsibility of a central government directly responsible to the ministry of the Imperial Parliament.[1] The Times remarked of this scheme that it was "pretty much the plan that has suggested itself to every dispassionate man who regards not only the unity of the Empire, but the safety of the loyal inhabitants of Ireland."[2]

Parnell followed on Trevelyan, and in the course of his speech showed that even the Nationalists did not receive Gladstone's bill with unadulterated satisfaction. He complained that the Imperial Parliament, by retaining control of customs,

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1 Hansard, cccix, cols. 1104-24.

2 The Times, 9 April 1886, p. 10.

retained control of three fourths of the revenues of Ireland, that it was unfair to ask Ireland to pay £1,000,000 for the Royal Irish Constabulary over which she was to have no control for the present, that one twentieth and not one fifteenth would be a suitable proportion for Ireland's share in Imperial expenditure, and that the power of veto for at least three years would give the first order (necessarily conservative because of the franchise) power to hang up any measure it pleased and so create a deadlock.[1]

Next morning Chamberlain, opening the debate, explained his resignation and made a highly damaging attack upon the Government of Ireland Bill. He declared that he would much prefer separation, pure and simple, to the sham union proposed by Gladstone and which was certain, he said, to result eventually in complete separation. He reminded the House of the opposition of the Irish Protestants, and especially of those in Ulster, and asked how it was to be overcome except by coercion. His own proposal was that all evictions should be stayed in Ireland for six months, and loans granted to landlords placed in financial difficulties through being forbidden to evict, and that the interval so gained should be used to set up a commission, representing all sections of the Commons, with the task of finding a satisfactory settlement of the home rule question. He recognised, he said, that "national councils" were no longer practicable and that

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[1] Hansard, cccix, cols. 1130-33.

nothing but a very substantial scheme would now be acceptable. He then advocated that the best solution lay in the adoption of a federal scheme.[1] He did not wish, he said, that any one existing federation, such as the American, or the German, or the Italian should be copied, but that one should be evolved which would take into account the special requirements of the United Kingdom.[2]

The unionist press lauded Chamberlain's destructive criticism,[3] but with the exception of the Scotsman[4] and Daily Telegraph, most were cold or indifferent to his advocacy of federation. The Spectator dismissed it as a rival scheme of disruption.[5]

Chamberlain had planned to base his speech, not only on his objections to the Government of Ireland Bill, but also on those to the land purchase bill which had not then been laid before Parliament. However, when Chamberlain was about to read the part of his letter of resignation which dealt with the land purchase bill Gladstone interrupted and forbade him to do so. Such a possibility had already occurred to

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1 Mr. C.H.D.Howard is inaccurate in stating in his article, "The Irish "central board" scheme, 1884-5," that Chamberlain proposed in his speech of 9 April that Ireland should be given "a constitution on the Canadian model" (Irish Historical Studies (1952-3), VIII, pp. 359-60). Chamberlain did not make this proposal in Parliament until his speech of 1 June 1886.

2 Hansard, cccix, cols. 1181-207.

3 Scotsman, 10 April 1886.

4 Daily Telegraph, 10 April 1886.

5 Spectator, 17 April 1886, p. 505.

Chamberlain:[1] he was but partially unhorsed and, although John Bright found it disappointing,[2] the speech was both a good defence of the course which Chamberlain had taken and a powerful attack on the bill. Gladstone's intervention made Chamberlain furious and he threatened to lay the matter before the House. The intervention and the fact that, apart from the retention of customs and customs-excise under the Imperial Parliament, Gladstone had not taken into account the criticisms made by Chamberlain at the time of his resignation may partially account for a friendlier attitude towards Hartington with whom he had just had a misunderstanding[3] about the arrangement of the debate. But probably a much more important factor was that Chamberlain must have been pleasantly surprised by a passage in the speech which Hartington made to the House a little while after Chamberlain had spoken. Discussing local government Hartington had said :

> It is quite possible, when the task is taken in hand, that it may be found that the desire which is felt by the people of the three kingdoms and the necessities of the case are not limited merely to the creation of County Boards or Municipal Councils, but that some larger provincial, and perhaps even national organisation

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1 Chamberlain to Dilke, 6 April 1886, Add.Mss. 43877, f. 37.

2 Bright's diary, 9 April 1886, The diaries of John Bright (edited by P. Bright), 540.

3 Churchill, II. 82-85; Gwynn and Tuckwell, II. 213-14; and Chamberlain to Dilke, 4, and 6 April 1886, Add. Mss. 43877, ff. 36 and 37; Dilke to Chamberlain (copy), 7 April 1886, Add. Mss. 43953, f. 73.

> and co-ordination of local authorities may be required in England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. When that time comes, let Ireland share in whatever is granted to England, Scotland or to Wales, but when it comes, it will, in my opinion, be the outgrowth of institutions which have not yet been created . . .[1]

This speech probably gave Chamberlain the impression, which he had during the following critical weeks, that Hartington had moved closer to him. For example on 15 May he wrote to Bright that he believed Hartington had made "great advances in the last few weeks" and would now have no difficulty in agreeing with him on a scheme of local government which would include Ireland.[2] Not until Hartington's speech at Bradford on 18 May did Chamberlain relinquish this impression that Hartington and he were substantially in agreement on the fundamentals of an Irish scheme.[3]

The first fruit of Chamberlain's new attitude was a letter to Hartington expressing in glowing terms admiration for his speech.[4] The speech was among the best that Hartington ever made and was worthy of the praise.[5] For the first time

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1 Hansard, cccix, col. 1252.

2 Chamberlain to Bright, 15 May 1886, Add.Mss.43387, f. 24.

3 Garvin, II. 239.

4 Chamberlain to Hartington, 10 April 1886, Chats. 340. 1969.

5 "Hartington far exceeded any previous effort, and spoke with a warmth, sincerity, dignity, and firmness which made the whole House feel that he was a real leader of men." (Lord John Manners to his brother, the Duke of Rutland, 10 April 1886, C. Whibley, Lord John Manners and his friends, II. 238).

he publicly took his place among those rallying resistance to home rule. "I believe," he said, "that now, at all events, the people of this country will require that their representatives shall, in relation to Irish affairs, agree to sink all minor differences, and to unite as one man for the maintenance of this great Impire . . ."[1]

On 14 April a combined Conservative and Liberal meeting was held at Her Majesty's Opera House and was addressed by both Salisbury and Hartington. Lord Cowper, a Liberal Unionist and former Irish viceroy, was chairman and among the speakers were the Liberals, Goschen, P. Rylands, Lord Fyfe, and E.R.Wodehouse.[2] Chamberlain had been invited to take part but had declined because, as he explained afterwards to Hartington, he believed that, if he were to appear with Salisbury, the Radicals would be furious and would desert him.[3]

The meeting seemed to herald an era of close co-operation and so it might have done but for the Liberal electors. They were much alarmed, especially the Radicals, and made clear that they would have nothing savouring of an alliance with the Conservatives. A week later a meeting of the Birmingham

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1 Hansard, vol. cccix, col. 1263.

2 The Times, 15 April 1886.

3 Chamberlain to Hartington, 1 April 1886, Chats. 340. 1966.

"Two Thousand" hissed at the mention of Hartington,[1] and on the 26th his name was treated with almost as little respect by his own constituents.[2] The result was that nothing resembling the Opera House meeting was again attempted, and that afterwards, except for Goschen and one or two others, no Liberal member could be induced to share a platform with Conservatives.[3] Three days after the meeting Goschen in writing to the Queen (who was still eager that Conservatives and unionist Liberals should coalesce[4]) reported that even Liberals "of standing and fair mindedness" were inclined to believe that they and the Conservatives could not work together even temporarily and that joint action damaged the cause.[5] In a further letter a fortnight later he informed her that Liberal members could scarcely be induced to attend meetings organised by the Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union. He himself, he added, would be present at two of their meetings that week but did not expect to be supported by any other member, and by comparatively few local Liberals.[6]

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1 Chamberlain to Dilke, 22 April 1886, Garvin, II. 216.

2 The Times, 27 April 1886, p. 5.

3 Lady Gwendolen Cecil (Life of Salisbury, III. 300) seems to be inaccurate in writing that "it was decided" by the Liberal leaders, who had taken part in the Opera House meeting "that the experiment must not be repeated and all community of platforms eschewed for the future.".

4 The Queen to Goschen, 25 April 1886, Letters of Queen Victoria, 3rd Series, I. 111-12.

5 Goschen to the Queen, 17 April 1886, ibid., 107-9.

6 Goschen to the Queen, 2 May 1886, ibid., 109.

The Conservatives were keenly disappointed at the anti-climax of the Opera House meeting. Salisbury wrote to Goschen that, although he did not understand, he recognized the existence of their fear of appearing friendly to the Conservatives.[1] "Their view [the unionist Liberals] seems to be," he wrote to a friend, "that in allying themselves with us, they are contracting a mésalliance; and though they are very affectionate in private, they don't like showing us to their friends till they have had time, to prepare them for the shock."[2]

The appropriateness of Salisbury's comparison was well illustrated at a gathering of almost all the unionist Whig peers, which took place at Derby House two days after the Opera House meeting. Churchill was present and left an account[3] which is the only available source for the proceedings. Hartington told the gathering they could not have a coalition. He believed, he added, that Lord Salisbury and his party were fighting for the unity of the Empire and not for personal advantage and that nothing could exceed their good faith and loyality. He could not make a definite statement, he said, but Liberal Unionists might take it for granted that in an election the Conservatives would support all Liberal

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1 Salisbury to Goschen, 21 April 1886, Cecil, III. 300.

2 Salisbury to a friend, 22 April 1886, ibid.

3 Churchill, II. 90.

Unionist candidates. Those present were urged either by Hartington or more likely by the speakers in general - Churchill's biographer does not make clear which - to use their influence upon local Liberal leaders; to warn members that their seats would be unsafe if they supported the bill; and to attend meetings if possible under Liberal auspices. The other speakers were Argyll, Derby, Camperdown, De Vesci, Ribblesdale and Selborne.

On 16 April Gladstone introduced his land purchase measure to a Commons almost as crowded as on the introduction of the Government of Ireland Bill. It was called the Bill for the Sale and Purchase of Land in Ireland and provided for the purchase of estates at the values allotted by the land courts in fixing judicial rents. Its application was to be in the hands of a State Authority, which was to be created by the Irish legislature. Repayment by the tenants was normally to be spread over twenty years and they were in addition to pay 4% interest on the purchase money for forty-nine years. Landlords were not to be compelled to part with their estates, but the tenants of those who chose to sell had no option but to purchase. An exception was holdings with a rental of £4 or under where the tenants did not wish to become freeholders. In these the State Authority was to become the owner and the tenants to continue as rent payers. In certain "congested districts" ownership of the holding was to pass from the landlord to the State Authority and not to the tenant. The

total liability of the bill was to be limited to £50,000,000, but Gladstone admitted that, if the scheme were to succeed, Parliament might eventually be required to authorise a further large sum.[1] The security for the money advanced was to be an arrangement by which the Imperial Government would appoint a Receiver General through whose hands the whole of the Irish revenues were to pass, together with the proceeds of the Irish customs and customs-excise imposed by the Imperial Parliament. The Receiver General was to deduct the amounts due for interest and repayment of capital under the land purchase bill, together with the Irish contributions to the Imperial Exchequer under the Government of Ireland Bill. After these deductions had been made the sum which remained was to pass to the Irish exchequer.

Chamberlain was exaggerating only a little when he remarked that the land purchase bill had no friends at all.[2] The Nationalist benches listened to Gladstone's exposition with a soberness which contrasted sharply with their reception of the Government of Ireland Bill.[3] In the debate that same evening, Parnell gave an indication of their discontent.[4]

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1 Hansard, CCCIV, cols 1803-5

2 Chamberlain to Labouchere, 30 April 1886, A. Thorold, The life of Henry Labouchere, 299-300.

3 Daily News, 17 April 1886, p. 4; and Chamberlain's speech, Hansard, vol. CCCIV, col. 1820.

4 Hansard, vol. CCCIV, cols. 1852-7.

The appointment of the Receiver General, he denounced, as a very unnecessary, strange, and absurd proposal, and one which would be most offensive to Ireland. He refrained from expressing outright the Nationalists' hostility to the valuation allotted to the estates, but warned that they could not accept a measure which over-compensated the landlords. The Radicals agreed with the Nationalists that the bill would give the landlords more than was their due, and even non-Radicals admitted that it treated the landlords with tenderness. The bill undoubtedly treated them generously, and had it not been linked with home rule would have been welcomed by many of them. William Johnson, M.P. for South Belfast, and head of the Orange Order in Ireland, thought it worth while to appeal to the poorer landlords not to betray the unionist cause in return for the benefits of the land purchase bill.[1] Very many in Great Britain were alarmed because they held that the Government of Ireland Bill would remove practically all physical security at the very time when the largeness of the sums to be advanced to the tenants made, they believed, such security of vital importance. They feared that the State Authority, although appointed by the Dublin legislature, would in no way prevent the tenants from looking upon Great Britain as the absentee landlord, who had taken advantage of the craving for home rule to impose on them an unfair bargain, and hence a bargain which they would consider themselves justified in repudiating. They also feared that in this the tenants would have the support of their

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[1] Northern Whig, 7 May 1886, p. 8.

representatives in the Dublin legislature. Many held that, under such circumstances, the retention by the Imperial Government of control of the Royal Irish Constabulary and the military forces in Ireland, instead of giving a sound security for the payment of the land annuities, would provide a very dangerous explosive element in the quarrels between the Dublin legislature and the Imperial Government. Most of those opposed to the measure appear to have agreed that the initial amount of £50,000,000, which Gladstone proposed, would be far from adequate, and that twice or three times that sum would be necessary. Some Liberals, and especially Radicals, asked "If commercial, religious, and other interests are to be safe in the hands of the Irish legislature, why not landlords?" A few of the more orthodoxly-minded denounced as land nationalisation the proposal that the state should retain the ownership of holdings in congested districts and of those tenants with a rental of £4 and under who requested it.[1]

The immediate reaction of the press to the land purchase bill was on the whole no more favourable than it had been to the Government of Ireland Bill. But there was this important difference, that, as the contest for the bills developed, several Liberal papers become more and more sympathetic to the Government of Ireland Bill, but none, or very few indeed,

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[1] e.g. The Scotsman wrote, "This is nothing more or less than the nationalisation of the land in those districts. Mr. Gladstone has taken a page out of Mr. Henry George." (17 April 1886, p. 8).

became more sympathetic to the land purchase bill. An outstanding example of the first trend was the Manchester Guardian, which on 3 May completely reversed the stand that it had taken on the exclusion of the Irish M.Ps.[1]

The reaction to the land purchase bill soon made it obvious that, if Gladstone were to continue to insist that it was inseparably connected with the Government of Ireland Bill, he would ensure the rejection of the latter bill also. Gladstone's first love was the Government of Ireland Bill and when he saw that the other measure was a millstone around its neck he changed his attitude. On 1 May he issued a letter to his constituents in which he warned the landlords that the sands were running in the hour-glass, and they had as yet given no indication of a desire to accept the land purchase bill.[2] This warning was widely construed as an indication that Gladstone would eventually pronounce the two bills to be separate and independent, and that, if necessary, he would sacrifice the land purchase bill in the interest of the other.

Chamberlain was the first speaker in the debate which followed the introduction of the land purchase bill. His first task was to complete that part of the explanation of his resignation which Gladstone had forced him to omit in the debate of eight days earlier. He acknowledged that the retention of the Irish customs and excise under the Imperial Parliament

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1 Manchester Guardian, 3 May 1886, p. 5.

2 The Times, 3 May 1886.

was a major improvement which had been made in the Government of Ireland Bill subsequent to his resignation, and remarked that, if the Irish representatives were retained at Westminster and the question of Ulster left open, the scheme would not differ greatly from the "national councils" proposal. He was severely critical of the land purchase bill, his remarks forming one of the most damaging attacks made upon it. Nevertheless, his concluding words were moderate. He said that he was not an irreconcilable opponent, and that if further modifications were made in the home rule bill he would be relieved from opposing it.[1] On the previous day Chamberlain had written to Gladstone in an equally moderate tone. Gladstone three days earlier had stated in the Commons that he did not consider either the retention of customs and excise by the Imperial Parliament, or the exclusion of Irish representation from it, to be essential aspects of his home rule bill. A possible solution to the latter problem, he had suggested, might be one which Whitbread had put forward by which Irish representation would be excluded for a number of years and then, if Ireland wished, would be readmitted in the proportion, and under the conditions, which might then be thought best.[2] Chamberlain wrote in his letter that this conciliatory statement and the discussion which had taken place seemed to have lessened considerably the differences

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1 Hansard, CCCIV, cols. 1811-24.

2 Hansard, CCCIV, cols. 1534-50.

which had arisen in the Cabinet and that he hoped they might be further reduced before the second reading.[1] Possibly the discussion which Chamberlain referred to was a further one with Harcourt.

Chamberlain's moderation may have been inspired by a returning hope that Gladstone, in order to have his bill pass the Commons, might after all come to terms with him; or perhaps he now realised more fully that if he were to carry with him the maximum number of supporters he must first prove to them that he had done his utmost for conciliation; or again, he may have been influenced by a fear for his hold on Birmingham where he felt certain Schnadhorst, the controller of the caucus, was working against him.[2] Chamberlain's friends had warned him that were he to keep up his quarrel with Gladstone of a week earlier he would damage his position in Birmingham.[3] There has been a tendency to overlook how serious it was for a Liberal to go against Gladstone and the party, and it was especially so for a radical. Not until he had met his local caucus, and had it pass a resolution approving the course which he had taken, was

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1 Chamberlain to Gladstone, 15 April 1886, Add. Mss. 44126, f. 181.

2 Chamberlain to J.T.Bunce (Editor, Birmingham Daily Post), 7 and 11 April 1886, q.w.o. Garvin, II. 209.

3 Garvin, II. 205

Chamberlain able to give a secondary place to the dread of being thrown over by Birmingham.[1] Others were less fortunate.

The introduction of Gladstone's bills was followed by an intensifying of the struggle in the constituencies. The second reading was not until 10 May and first the lull within the House and then the recess were used to carry the battle to the public platforms. Knowing at last the exact nature of Gladstone's schemes, a number of Liberals, including Hartington, Chamberlain, and Goschen, hastened to justify themselves before the constituencies. Many others declined to go against Gladstone in public until absolute necessity should force them. And then, of course, there were those - and they were a numerous and important group - who approved of certain aspects of Gladstone's schemes and were still hoping against hope that some compromise solution which they could support would in the end carry the day.

Now that battle was joined unionist Liberals became quickly conscious of their lack of organisation and so around 20 April a committee to secure concerted action was formed. The committee soon had an impressive list of Moderate Liberals on its roll, but few Radicals. Chamberlain declined to join but sent a friendly letter.[2] F. Maude, an unsuccessful candidate in the previous election, was made secretary and offices were taken in Spring Gardens. The Times learnt of the new body with

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1 Garvin, II. 215.

2 Elliot, II. 82.

much satisfaction and gave it the leading article.[1] Out of this committee a Liberal Unionist party machine was to develop.

One Ulsterman of the period has compared the consternation caused among the Ulster unionists by the Government of Ireland Bill to that which filled the Parisians on the Sunday in August 1870 when they learned that the Germans had broken the frontier defences.[2] Very soon reports began to emanate from Ulster of drilling and other preparations for armed resistance. On 6 May William Johnston, the head of the Irish Orange Order, stated in a speech that Lord Wolseley had promised to resign his commission and to lead the unionist military forces should Gladstone's bill pass[3] - a statement which, it seems, Lord Wolseley would not deny.[4] Many of these reports from Ulster were undoubtedly much exaggerated, but the fact that among the papers of Colonel Saunderson, the Irish Conservative leader, are rifle quotations obtained at this time from foreign firms[5] indicates that the Ulster unionists were already as resolute as they were to be when threatened by the home rule

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1 The Times, 21 April 1886.

2 T. Macknight, Ulster as it is, 130.

3 Northern Whig, 7 May 1886, p. 8. (Johnston made this speech in Belfast, and not in Dungannon as reported in Daily News and other papers.

4 Campbell-Bannerman's answer to a question by T. .Healy on Johnston's statement, Hansard, CCCV, col. 908.

5 R. Lucas, Colonel Saunderson, L.P., 101.

bill of 1912. Even the Irish Protestant Home Rule Association, which was formed in Belfast on 21 May, had the retention of Irish representation in the Imperial Parliament as one of its objects.[1] Bryce has recorded that he tried to induce some of the Ulster Liberals to make suggestions for the amendment of the home rule bill, but they refused absolutely.[2] He commented that their blood was up, and that they considered themselves betrayed into the hands of the Parnellites, whom they disliked and despised.[3]

Chamberlain met his divisional council on 21 April and defended the course which he had taken. The land purchase bill he attacked without mercy. But his opposition to the Government of Ireland Bill, he said, was condition 1 and was largely grounded on the exclusion of the Irish members from Westminster. If Gladstone were to meet his objections he would support him with real gratitude and delight, he declared, but if not - then at all hazards he would oppose the measures. But he would act independently, he said, and would not join a "cave" or enter a coalition of discordant elements and parties.[4]

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1 Irish News, 22 May 1886, p. 5. (The Belfast unionist newspapers ignored this event).

2 Bryce's memoir, H.A.L.Fisher, James Bryce, 219.

3 Ibid.

4 The Times, 22 April 1886.

Chamberlain carried the meeting with him and a vote of unabated confidence was passed by an overwhelming majority. A proposal was then put forward that the meeting be adjourned to a later date to allow time for reflection. This move would have been much to the advantage of the Gladstonian element, and was vigorously opposed by Chamberlain and Collings who insisted that a decisive vote be taken that night.[1] Their opponents gave way and Dr. Dale, the influential radical clergyman, moved a resolution committing the "Two Thousand" to Chamberlain's position. It was carried with ease. Had it not been carried the blow to Chamberlain's influence in Parliament and the country would have been severe. On the previous evening William Kenrick, Chamberlain's brother-in-law and member for North Birmingham, had had a similar success with his divisional council.[2]

Five days later Hartington met his constituents at Rossendale and was given a much less favourable reception. His speech was a straightforward defence of the course which he had taken and he defined his attitude towards Radicals and Conservatives.

> I desire to work . . ., he said, not with our Tory opponents, but with men like Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Trevelyan (groans) or like Mr. Goschen or Sir Henry James (groans) in the Commons House of Parliament, and with men . . . like Lord Selbourne, Lord Derby and the Duke of Argyll.[3]

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1 A.W.W.Dale, Life of R.W.Dale of Birmingham, 460.

2 Birmingham Daily Post, 21 April 1886.

3 The Times, 27 April 1886, p. 5.

When Hartington sat down, instead of a resolution of confidence in him being moved, a trimming resolution from which he dissociated himself was put forward and passed.[1] He did not, however, have the humiliating experience, which was the lot of some unionist Liberals, of having a resolution of confidence in Gladstone passed at his meeting.

On 5 May the general committee of the National Liberal Federation met at the Westminster Palace Hotel in London and voted its complete confidence in Gladstone by an overwhelming majority.[2] The dissentient Liberals resigned and the caucus became the obedient servant of the Gladstonians. Chamberlain was helpless to avert the disaster, as the majority of the local associations outside of the Birmingham area were strongly for Gladstone. As the Annual Register noted, these local bodies were much more in favour of Mr. Gladstone than were the members whom they had returned a few months previously.[3] The loss of the caucus was a grave blow to all unionist Liberals. Local associations had already been exercising considerable pressure on behalf of the Government bills, but now they considerably increased it as the numerous complaints

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1 Ibid.

2 Daily News, 6 May 1886, p. 6; and R.S.Watson, The National Liberal Federation, 1877 to 1906, 55 et seq.

3 The Times, 13 May 1886.

testify. The newspapers contained many references to caucus pressure and it was strongly complained about at Chamberlain's meeting on 12 May.[1]

Caucus pressure was not the only pressure which members had to contend with. From the introduction of the Government of Ireland Bill, and even earlier, a steady struggle had been going on between Gladstonians and unionists to win over as many as possible of the numerous waverers by individual persuasion. Sir A.E.Pease has recorded that Albert Grey, Sir George Trevelyan, and Arthur Elliot were the principal Liberal Unionist organisers of these activities.[2] He wrote that Grey was especially successful with young members because of his tact, temper, and humour, but that his conversations with them were only preliminaries for bringing them along for a "chat" with Hartington or Goschen or Sir Henry James.[3] Nevertheless, many of the victims of this subtle tug of war continued to be genuinely perplexed and undecided men until the eve of the division on the second reading -

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1 Ibid., 25 May 1886.

2 Pease states that "there was no attempt whatever to counter them [unionist attempts to convert the waverers] on the Gladstonian side." He may have been given this impression because he had no personal experience of such attempts - but then he was an advocate of the bills. Morley, a better observer, writes - and the evidence supports his statement - that coaxing, bullying, managing, and all the other arts of party emergency went on at an unprecedented rate and that no section had a monopoly. (Morley, III. 325-6).

3 Sir A.E.Pease, Elections and recollections, 108.

and perhaps no wonder![1] Labouchere with his usual light-hearted cynicism remarked, "Half of these people are like women, who are pleased to keep up the 'I will and I won't' as long as possible in order to be courted."[2] He thought that generally such people became Gladstonians.[3]

Home rule divided the community in a way rarely known in Britain.[4] Many an old friendship was broken and even family ties were severed, or strained to breaking point. In some Liberal homes Gladstone's portrait disappeared from the walls;[5] in others it was Chamberlain's.[6] The bitterest feeling tended

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1 On 7 June Sir A.E.Pease recorded in his diary, "The day has come at last, and there are still waverers and shufflers who do not know what they are going to do." (Sir A.E.Pease, Elections and recollections, 137).

2 Labouchere to Chamberlain, 29 May 1886, Chamberlain, 222-4, and A.Thorold, The life of Henry Labouchere, 318-20.

3 Ibid.

4 This incident recorded by the Gladstonian member, Sir A.E. Pease gives an indication of the feeling which home rule aroused. He had been asked to respond to a toast at the centenary meetings of the Incorporated Law Society. "The majority present being Tories from a distance created an unprecedented scene in York. They would not let me say a single word and kept on roaring at me after repeated attempts by the President [Lord Ripon] and the Toast Master to get me a hearing. The occasion was non-political and I never intrude politics in social gatherings." (Sir A.E.Pease's diary, Autumn, 1886, quoted, Sir A.E.Pease, Elections and recollections, 147).

5 Morley, III. 322.

6 H. Matthews to H. Gladstone, 27 April 1886, Add. Mss. 46021, f. 59.

to be between those who had previously been associates.[1] Gladstonian and unionist Radicals were specially malevolent towards one another and the same is true of Gladstonian and unionist Whigs. The Irish Nationalists reserved their most poisonous venom for Chamberlain, who had endeavoured to give them "national councils". The Queen,[2] the court, and society were against home rule and Gladstonians had to endure much social proscription. Sir Henry James considered that party feeling in social circles was most bitter during the years 1886 to 1890 and that there had been nothing like it since the Reform Bill of 1832.[3] He recorded in his memoir that the unionists were most angry with Spencer, whom they considered an especial traitor,[4] and with Harcourt, and that during those

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1 Sir A.E.Pease noted in his diary (May, 1887) ". . . they [the Liberal Unionists] are more viciously bitter than our Conservative opponents. Give me every time a Tory, who can speak with civility at least, when he has to meet such social outcasts as ourselves." (Sir A.E.Pease, op. cit., 171).

2 The Prince of Wales took a different attitude from the Queen. On 5 March Sir E.W.Hamilton informed Gladstone that a few weeks earlier the Queen had told the Prince of Wales that he must do what he could to induce Gladstone to reveal his plans, but the Prince of Wales had refused point-blank and instead of applauding peers, as the Queen had done, for refusing office had counselled several of his friends to accept. (Add. Mss. 44191, f. 65).

3 James' memoir, Lord Askwith, Lord James of Hereford, 189.

4 e.g. The representative of the British Weekly (W. Robertson Nicoll?) at the Liberal Unionist conference on 7 Dec. 1886 recorded that the mention of Harcourt's name in a speech "provoked the strongest manifestations of contempt and disgust - two gentlemen beside me relieving their feelings by spitting." (British Weekly, 10 Dec. 1886, p. 3)

years no unionist would have asked either man to dine without receiving the assent of their other guests to meet him.[1]

In the House of Lords Gladstone was left with a mere rump of his former supporters[2] and in the world of intellect there was almost as grave a landslide. Among those who had previously supported or sympathised with the Liberal party but now became unionists were Dicey, Seely, Froude, Spencer, Lecky, Goldwin Smith, Martineau, Sir William Thomson (later Lord Kelvin), Huxley, Tyndall, Tennyson, Browning, Matthew Arnold, and Jowett.[3] As Brett remarked, "all the argument, all the authority, all the social influence" were against Gladstone.[4]

Chamberlain strove to induce Gladstone to meet his objections to the Government of Ireland Bill. Labouchere, who was in touch with Herbert Gladstone, Arnold Morley (the Liberal chief whip), and occasionally with John Morley, was the intermediary. A letter, which Chamberlain wrote to him on 17 April, began the negotiations. In it Chamberlain stated:

> . . . We cannot leave the matter uncertain till after the Second Reading. . . . in that case we shall get nothing

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1 James' memoir, loc. cit.

2 See below p. 198.

3 The Times on 4 May 1886 listed nine of the above fourteen names together with those of Sir John Lubbock, Lord Wolseley, and Sir Frederick Leighton.

4 R.B.Brett's journal, 29 May 1886, Letters and journals of Reginald Viscount Esher, I. 126.

> but be beaten in detail on every division. All I ask is that Mr. Gladstone should give some sufficient assurance that he will consent - first, to the retention of the Irish representation at Westminster on its present footing or according to population, and at the same time the maintenance of Imperial control over Imperial taxation in Ireland; and secondly, that he should be willing to abandon all the so-called safeguards in connection with the Constitution of the new legislative body in Dublin. . . .[1]

Gladstone's comment on these demands was that he could not write a "kootooing" letter to Chamberlain and that decency, principle and policy alike forbade him to enter into private arrangements about alterations of the bill in committee.[2] He would not, he assured Morley, move an inch in the direction of Chamberlain without consultation and perhaps not much with it.[3]

During the remainder of April Chamberlain continued to impress on Labouchere that he could not vote for the second reading of the home rule bill unless he were assured of alterations.[4] Chamberlain even hinted that, if his views were not met, he would embark on an anti-Gladstone campaign in the country.[5] Then on 2 May he forwarded what Morley described as a five barrelled ultimatum,[6] and which Gladstone considered sufficiently important to read to the Cabinet.[7]

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1 Chamberlain to Labouchere, 17 April 1886, Chamberlain, 210-11 and A.Thorold, The Life of Henry Labouchere, 292.

2 Gladstone to Morley (copy), 20 April 1886, Add.Mss.44548, p.146

3 Gladstone to Morley (copy), 21 April 1886, ibid., p.148

4 Chamberlain to Labouchere, 17 (letter no. 2), 21, 22, and 30 April 1886, A.Thorold, The Life of Henry Labouchere, Chap.xii.

5 Chamberlain to Labouchere, 17 (letter no. 2) and 22 April, 1886, ibid.

6 Harcourt to Chamberlain, 3 May 1886, q.w.o. Garvin, II. 223-4.

7 Garvin, II. 231-2.

> . . . I have asked for supremacy of the Imperial Parliament, he stated, separate assembly for Ulster, abolition of all restrictions and minority representation devices. All these I am ready to leave to their chance in Committee, if the Government will say before the 2nd Reading that they will retain Irish representation on its present footing. To leave it an open question is a mere farce. Bright and the Whigs would vote against us and the Government, while leaving the question free, would use all their weight and give their vote against the amendment.. . . You must give up the idea of "the open question." That would be an absolute and complete surrender on my part.. . . You seem to assume that the Land Bill will be dropped. Is this so? If not, what is to happen when I propose its rejection?
>
> I wish there was some way of withdrawing both Bills - either before or after the 2nd Reading and accepting the affirmation of the principles.[1]

"The retention of the Irish representatives is clearly the pierre de touche," Chamberlain wrote to Dilke. "If they go separation must follow - if they remain Federation is possible whenever local assemblies are established in England and Scotland."[2] Apart from such reasoning Chamberlain's decision to restrict his immediate demand to this one matter was tactically a well chosen course. The exclusion of the Irish aroused strong and widespread alarm and even Herbert Gladstone admitted that he was against it.[3 & 4] By narrowing

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[1] Chamberlain to Labouchere (copy), 2 May 1886, Add. Mss. 44126, f. 183.

[2] Chamberlain to Dilke, 3 May 1886, Add. Mss. 43877, f. 41 (Gwynn and Tuckwell, II. 217).

[3] Herbert Gladstone to Labouchere, 2 May 1886, Hammond, Gladstone and the Irish nation, 528.

[4] The Pall Mall Gazette, edited by W.T.Stead, opposed the Government of Ireland Bill solely because it excluded Irish representation from Westminster.

his demand Chamberlain became the spokesman of a much larger group, and at the same time he increased his hold on many of his own followers for it enabled him to emphasise to the maximum - not his opposition to the bills - but his repeatedly stated desire for conciliation. Also it saved him from the danger of being classed with the Whigs.

Prior to the end of April one does not like to be dogmatic about Chamberlain's hopes or motives. Possibly he never had any real expectation that Gladstone would make concessions on fundamentals of the Government of Ireland Bill for none would know better than Chamberlain that, if Gladstone were to do so, he would be risking the loss of the eighty-six Parnellites, plus Liberals such as Morley, Harcourt, and Rosebery, in the hope of gaining at most some fifty dissentients. From May onwards one is on firmer ground. On the 5th of that month he wrote to Harcourt ". . . I may frankly say that I do not want a compromise. I would prefer to fight the matter out and abide the result; but I am compelled to make advances to satisfy the anxiety of my friends to keep the party together if possible."[1] Next day in an intimate latter to Dilke he elaborated on his ideas and motives.

> . . . I do not expect the Government to give way, and indeed I do not wish it. To satisfy others I have talked about conciliation and have consented to make advances, but on the whole I would rather vote against the Bill than not and the retention of the Irish members is only with me the Flag that covers other objections. I want to

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[1] Chamberlain to Harcourt, 5 May 1886, q.w.o. Garvin, II. 224.

> see the whole Bill recast and brought back to the National Councils proposals, with the changes justified by the altered public opinion.. . .[1]

If one were unconvinced that this was the real Chamberlain one need only turn to his letter to Hartington on 4 May:

> It would be fatal to move a reasoned amendment to the Home Rule Bill. By all means stick to the plain negative. . . . there is so much pressure from the constituencies that if you alter the motion of rejection and give any excuse to the waverers you will lose 50 votes at least.
>
> . . . Labouchere writes . . . that Mr. G. will give way to me and allow the retention of the Irish members at Westminster. I doubt it: but if it is true I must vote for the 2nd Reading and I estimate that from 50 to 55 members will go with me. In this case the 2nd Reading will be carried, but I cannot see how the Bill can go further. The retention of the Irish members involves the following changes.. . .
>
> 1. A separate assembly for Ulster.
>
> 2. The complete subordination of the Irish Assemblies to the Imperial Parliament.
>
> 3. Irish Assemblies to deal only with subjects especially referred to them . . .
>
> 4. . . . the Imperial Parliament to collect all taxation as now . . .
>
> It is possible that if the Bill gets into Committee it will go to pieces on one of these rocks. If I have to vote for the 2nd Reading I shall make it clear that the step does not satisfy me except as a step towards the complete recast of the Bill.
>
> I think it right that you should know exactly how matters stand, but please keep this information quite private.[2]

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[1] Chamberlain to Dilke, 6 May 1886, Add. Mss. 43877, f. 46 (Gwynn and Tuckwell, II. 221-2).

[2] Chamberlain to Hartington, 4 May 1886, Chats. 340. 1989 (q.w.o., Garvin, II. 222).

Twelve years later Chamberlain in conversation with Barry O'Brien described his aims at this period and in the main his description rings true.

> . . . I was not opposed, he said, to the reform of the land laws. I was not opposed to land purchase. It was the right way to settle the land question. But there were many things in the Bill to which I was opposed on principle. My main object in attacking it, though, was to kill the Home Rule Bill. As soon as the Land Bill was out of the way, I attacked the question of the exclusion of the Irish members. I used that point to show the absurdity of the whole scheme.[1]

By the end of April Chamberlain was strengthened by the certainty, which the Gladstonians could no longer dispute,[2] that, with him against it, the home rule bill was doomed. On 30 April he reckoned that one hundred and eleven Liberals were against it, and that fifty-nine of them had publicly committed themselves.[3] By 4 May his list stood at one hundred and nineteen of whom seventy were publicly committed and twenty-three almost certain. Of the one hundred and nineteen he reckoned that fifty-five would vote for the second reading if he were to say that the amendments were satisfactory.[4] Two days later his figure was one hundred

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1 R.B.O'Brien, The life of Charles Stewart Parnell, II. 140.

2 A.Morley to Gladstone, 3 May 1886, Add. Mss. 44253, f. 7, and Labouchere to Chamberlain, 3 May 1886, A. Thorold, Life of Henry Labouchere, 303.

3 Chamberlain to Dilke, 30 April 1886, Add. Mss. 43877, f. 39, and Chamberlain to Labouchere, 30 April 1886, A.Thorold, op. cit., 299.

4 Chamberlain to Labouchere (copy), 2 May 1886, Add. Mss. 44126, f. 183, and Chamberlain to Harcourt, 2 May 1886, q.w.o., Garvin, II. 223.

and thirty-three with eighty-four certainties.[1] The Gladstonians thought Chamberlain over sanguine in his estimates,[2] but the division on 8 June was to prove that he was not far from the mark.

Gladstone was determined that, if humanly possible, his party should go to the country with the valuable prestige of having passed their measure through a second reading, for the unionism of the Lords made a dissolution certain. To achieve his object he had become willing, even before the introduction of the home rule bill, to concede much if in that way he could win over a sufficient number of the men whose objections centred on the exclusion of the Irish members. However, the suggestions which he had made had quickly revealed that an important section of the Gladstonians, including Morley, Spencer, and Harcourt, were strong exclusionists, as was also Parnell,[3] and that Harcourt was ready to resign on the question.[4] At last on 5 May Gladstone circulated a memorandum to the Cabinet in which he suggested that the Irish members should be admitted to the Imperial Parliament when taxation affecting Ireland should be under discussion and on such other occasions as the Irish parliament should request their admission, and that a standing committee representing England, Scotland, and Ireland should be set up to consider the bills

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1 Chamberlain to Hartington, 4 May 1886, Chats. 340. 1989; and Chamberlain to Labouchere, 4 May 1886, A. Thorold, op. cit.,304.

2 Harcourt to Chamberlain, 3 May 1886, q.w.o., Garvin, II. 223; and Labouchere to Chamberlain, 3 May 1886, A.Thorold, op.cit., 303.

3 Morley to Gladstone, 8 May 1886, Add.Mss. 4425, f. 86; Spencer to Harcourt (draft), 15 April 1886, Harcourt vol., Althorp; Morley, III. 324; and Gardiner, I. 578-9.

4 Gardiner, I. 578-9.

and motions of secondary importance which affected Ireland but were excluded from the authority of her parliament.[1] The Cabinet discussed these proposals at their meeting on the 8th and decided that the Irish members should be admitted to the Imperial Parliament for taxation involving Ireland, and that plans to implement the other two proposals should be considered favourably.[2] Thus stood matters when Gladstone moved the second reading on 10 May.

On the 3 May, the day after Chamberlain had written his "five barrelled ultimatum", Arnold Morley asked Labouchere to his room and inquired whether Chamberlain would vote for the second reading if the Government were to support a clause granting representation to Ireland, but leaving to the committee stage the decision on how many should constitute representation.[3] Labouchere replied that he thought so, but that he had best consult Chamberlain's letter.[4] Three days later Labouchere wrote to Chamberlain that Gladstone refused to leave out the clause excluding the Irish, but that he had devised an alternative scheme which fully recognised the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament and enabled the Irish to vote on taxation, imperial matters, etc. The new scheme, he added, would not be definite until approved by the Cabinet.[5]

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1 Memorandum by Gladstone, 5 May 1886, Add. Mss. 44772, f. 95.

2 Herbert Gladstone to Henry Gladstone, 14 May 1886, J.L. Hammond, op. cit., 530-1.

3 Labouchere to Chamberlain, 3 May 1886, A.Thorold, on. cit., 303-4.

4 Ibid.

5 Labouchere to Chamberlain, 6 May 1886, ibid., 305-6.

Chamberlain, perhaps much influenced by this information, next day sent a letter to the press in which he redefined his attitude. The Government of Ireland Bill, he explained, had been drafted on the lines of separation or colonial independence, but he believed that it should have been a federal scheme which could later include the other parts of the United Kingdom and, perhaps at a more distant date, the overseas dependencies. The vital factor, he emphasised, was the maintenance of the full representation of Ireland in the Imperial Parliament and of Ireland's full responsibility in imperial affairs, and that this was a matter of supreme importance which could not be left to the hazards of committee. He assumed, he wrote, that the treatment of Ulster was an open question and would be decided according to the wishes of the Ulstermen. He then proceeded to make upon the measure what immediately strikes one as a surprisingly severe and unnecessary attack if he were genuinely trying to induce Gladstone to come to terms. He stated that the bill made necessary anomalies and restrictions which no true Liberal could approve; that it offered no prospect of finality, but would be a fulcrum for further agitation; that it had brought civil war in Ireland within measurable distance; and that it would create a foreign and hostile nation whose reconquest was actually contemplated as a possibility by the promoters of the bill despite the fact that their measure would deprive Britain of all authority to

interfere.[1] Was this, one wonders, but another example of Chamberlain's irrepressible truculence, or was he deliberately trying to stop Gladstone from offering him concessions - concessions which, to judge from Labouchere's report, while not going the whole way, would go far enough to win over many of the bill's opponents? Gladstone's comment on Chamberlain's letter was that it made "it hopeless to frame a measure of conciliation for him."[2]

On the same day as he wrote this letter Chamberlain had a long talk with Labouchere and at the end of it dictated to him his minimum terms[3] - terms to which Labouchere was confident that Gladstone would consent.[4] No record of them is available, but they seem to have included the retention of Irish representation at Westminster and the suggestion that it should consist of ninety members.[5] Next day Labouchere went to Downing Street and sent the document into Gladstone during a meeting of the Cabinet.[6] In Downing Street Labouchere had discussions with Arnold Morley, Wolverton, and perhaps other Gladstonians. He suggested that Herschell, the

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1 Chamberlain to T.H.Bolton, 7 May 1886, The Times, 8 May 1886, p. 12.

2 Gladstone to Morley (copy), 8 May 1886, Add. Mss. 44548, p. 168.

3 H.Labouchere, "The secret history of the first home rule bill," Truth, 14 Oct. 1908, p. 878.

4 Ibid.

5 Labouchere to Chamberlain, 8 May 1886, A.Thorold, The Life of Henry Labouchere, 306-7.

6 H.Labouchere, "The secret history of the first home rule bill", loc. cit.

Chancellor, should meet Chamberlain for a discussion and found that the idea was well received.[1] Later in the day he met Stansfeld on a train and learned that "all went right at the cabinet",[2] which news he telegraphed to Chamberlain.[3] Chamberlain, believing that the Government had capitulated, telegraphed the news to two or three people.[4] One was none other than Captain O'Shea. O'Shea informed Parnell who at once forwarded the telegram to Gladstone.[5] Did Chamberlain hope by his action to precipitate a revolt by Parnell against the concessions which appeared imminent?

By the following day (Sunday, the 9th) Chamberlain had learned that both Gladstone and Herbert Gladstone had denied that there would be concessions.[6] He sent a sharp note informing Labouchere of this, and added that, unless the assurance in Gladstone's speech should be precise and definite, he would vote for certain against the second reading.[7] Alarmed, Labouchere drafted out a memorandum which Arnold

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1 Labouchere to Chamberlain, 8 May 1886.

2 Labouchere to Chamberlain, telegram, 8 May 1886, A.Thorold, op. cit., 307.

3 Ibid.

4 Garvin, II. 227.

5 Ibid.

6 Chamberlain to Labouchere, 9 May 1886, A.Thorold, op. cit., 309, and Garvin, II. 227.

7 Ibid.

Morley sent post haste to Gladstone who was at Sheen. Unfortunately the memorandum seems to be lost, but in it Labouchere set out as essentials these three points:

> 1. That the Government will assent to the principle of full representation upon all questions of taxation.
>
> 2. That some means will be found by which the Irish opinion on questions excluded from the Dublin Parliament shall be conveyed to the Imperial Parliament, such as a joint Committee representing England, Scotland and Ireland.
>
> 3. That the Irish Parliament will have the right by address to claim representation upon any question of Imperial policy.[1]

Gladstone wrote back to Morley that Labouchere's memorandum was the best thing that he had seen, and that:

> Point 1. Taxation. I am instructed from yesterday to promise this shall be done if agreeable to the House.
>
> Point 2. I have authority to speak on this with favour.
>
> Point 3. To the principle of this I am favourable and I have no reason to believe the Cabinet are hostile. I am not so certain, as with respect to the two former that a practical proposal can be easily put into shape. But I may refer to the subject in no adverse spirit.[2]

Arnold Morley explained to Labouchere that a satisfactory plan had not yet been devised for the third point, or a definition of "imperial" agreed upon, and that in consequence Gladstone would be rather guarded on the third point in his speech, but would make clear that he accepted it in principle. Also, he said that should Chamberlain think Gladstone's words too vague, or could suggest others, Herschell would consult with

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1 Gladstone to Arnold Morley (copy), letter No. 2, 9 May 1886, Add. Mss. 44548, p. 172.

2 Ibid.

him.[1]

These further communications convinced Chamberlain that the Government had resolved to give way, but left him unmoved in his determination to destroy the bill. He at once wrote to Hartington:

> . . . it is impossible for me to doubt that the surrender will be ample and complete and that I shall have to vote for the 2nd Reading. Surely if this should prove to be the case, your line will be to comment on magnitude of change and suddenness of conversion and ask that the new Bill should be produced before any opinion is called for. . . .[2]

In a note written the same morning to Jesse Collings he said: "I am assured that there is a complete surrender to me. I expect a terrific row in this case - perhaps Parnell will revolt" -[3] a remark which one instinctively, and perhaps rightly, connects with the telegram to O'Shea. In a letter which he wrote that day, and which appeared in the press on the 13th, he informed an Ulster Liberal Unionist,

> . . . If Mr. Gladstone should tonight yield the point about representation, the next great issue will be as to the claims and position of Ulster. You may rest assured I shall do all in my power to obtain full and fair consideration for them.[4]

Gladstone moved the second reading on Monday the 10th and so confident had the Chamberlainites become that they were -

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1 Labouchere to Chamberlain, 9 May 1886, A.Thorold, op. cit., 308-9.

2 Chamberlain to Hartington, 10 May 1886, q.w.o., Garvin, II. 226.

3 Chamberlain to Jesse Collings, 10 May 1886, ibid.

4 Chamberlain to Thomas Sinclair, 10 May 1886, Daily Telegraph, 13 May 1886.

to use their whip, Caine's expression[1] - about to be "squared" that they came with speeches prepared for accepting Gladstone's concessions.[2] Gladstone, however, made no capitulation such as they expected. The Government was willing, he said, to allow Irish members to take part in the Imperial Parliament when it should be dealing with Irish customs and excise. Also, he vaguely suggested that Ireland should have her say in Imperial matters through a system of executive communications as in certain other countries, or by a joint commission representing both the Imperial and Dublin parliaments.[3] Chamberlain, Kate Courtney informs us, looked black as thunder and tore up his notes.[4] "We are as we were - only more so," Caine told her husband.[5]

Gladstone appears to have believed that the modifications foreshadowed in his speech would satisfy Chamberlain. On the previous evening he had told Herbert Gladstone that Arnold Morley had written that Chamberlain was satisfied and would be the first speaker after the moving of the second reading.[6]

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1 Kate Courtney's diary, 10 May 1886, Courtney, XXII.

2 Ibid.

3 Hansard, CCCV, cols. 594-5.

4 Kate Courtney's diary, 10 May 1886.

5 Ibid.

6 Herbert Gladstone to Henry Gladstone, 14 May 1886, J.L. Hammond, Gladstone and the Irish nation, 530-1. Herbert Gladstone in his letter added, "Knowing what the Cabinet [on the previous day] had settled I was surprised but had no grounds for discouraging the idea ".

After the speech Labouchere reported to Chamberlain that Gladstone had walked off convinced that his speech was most satisfactory.[1] Herbert Gladstone asserted that the misunderstanding occurred through Labouchere, Arnold Morley, and Chamberlain and that he thought it was mostly Labouchere's fault.[2] Even if Herbert Gladstone was correct in this, which is doubtful, the discrepancy between Gladstone's speech and his reply to Labouchere's three points is not explained. There the important factor was most probably an entire misreading by Gladstone of the first point - that the Government would assent to the principle of full representation upon all questions of taxation. The phrase "all questions of taxation" he probably interpreted as meaning all questions of taxation imposed upon Ireland by the Imperial Parliament, while Chamberlain, with the object of giving Ireland the maximum amount of her share in imperial affairs, probably meant every taxation question brought before the Imperial Parliament no matter whether it would, or would not, be imposed upon Ireland. Gladstone had replied "I am instructed from yesterday to promise this shall be done if agreeable to the House." But the conclusion at the previous day's cabinet had been that the Irish members should be admitted for taxation involving Ireland,[3] by which presumably they meant taxation

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1 Labouchere to Chamberlain, 15 May 1886, A.Thorold, The life of Henry Labouchere, 310-11.

2 Herbert Gladstone to Henry Gladstone, 14 May 1886.

3 Ibid.

which would be collected within Ireland. Under the Government of Ireland Bill such taxes were limited to customs and excise - the two enumerated by Gladstone in his speech.

Labouchere, although as disappointed as anyone by Gladstone's speech, recommenced his endeavours to bring about an understanding.[1] He tried to induce Chamberlain to meet Herschell as had been proposed,[2] but Chamberlain had had enough of the negotiations and as it happened Gladstone had given a convenient excuse for making an end to them. In his speech Gladstone had spoken of the advantages of public declarations as contrasted with the inconveniences of underground negotiations. After such a statement, wrote Chamberlain, he could not enter on further private discussions.[3]

Unlike Chamberlain the Gladstonians were eager to continue the negotiations. On the same day as Chamberlain put an abrupt end to them by his reply to Labouchere Herbert Gladstone was writing the following letter:

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1 Labouchere to Chamberlain, 10 May 1886, A. Thorold, The life of Henry Labouchere, 310-11.

2 Labouchere to Chamberlain, telegram, 11 May 1886, A. Thorold, op. cit., 311.

3 Labouchere to Chamberlain, 11 May 1886, Chamberlain, 217, and A. Thorold, op. cit., 311.

> . . . I think there is a decided break in the clouds. I have done my level best this morning to put the P.M. in exact possession of the position resulting from yesterday's debate, and of Chamberlain's views. I see perfectly that his position is a very difficult one but I hope he will not assume from the speech yesterday that there is not every wish consistent with maintaining the principle of the Bill, to meet his views fairly. I wasn't satisfied myself with yesterday's "concession", but I am certain of this - that its deficiency was due not to a want of good will to meet fair objections, but because Father had not sufficiently mastered the difficulties which presented themselves to his mind, and which no doubt mainly resulted from Saturday's Cabinet.
>
> I think now he has arrived at what may distinctly be a basis of conciliation, if his colleagues agree, founded on the three points. The matter has been more fully thought out and I am in good hopes that when Herschel [sic.] sees Chamberlain tomorrow he may be able to give substantive proposals. All this is of course my belief as it is my strong desire. And I sincerely hope that the situation of Sunday and Monday morning may be considered to hold good till tomorrow at any rate.
>
> The objects which I have been striving to influence my Father to work for more thoroughly of vital importance to the Bill are:
>
> (1) Full representation on taxation.
>
> (2) Power to Irish Parliament to have direct share in Imperial and excluded subjects.
>
> (3) Effective supremacy of Crown and Parliament over Irish Parliament.[1]

Herbert Gladstone's appeal left Chamberlain unmoved. He doubted the advantage of further confidential communications, he stated, but was willing to see Herschell as a friend.[2]

Trevelyan seems to have taken no part in these negotiations. He did not like them and later admitted that he was glad when

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1 Herbert Gladstone to Labouchere, 11 May 1886, Chamberlain, 217-18.

2 Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 218.

they were abandoned.[1] He thought that if Chamberlain had gained the concessions demanded Chamberlain would have appeared successful, but that in reality Gladstone would have been the only one to profit.[2]

Once Chamberlain had discovered the exact nature of Gladstone's concessions he called a meeting of his supporters to take place at his London house on 12 May. The invitation was addressed to all Liberal members in favour of granting autonomy to Ireland but opposed to the Government measure as it stood.[3] Fifty-two attended and about twelve others sent expressions of sympathy with the objects of the meeting.[4] In his address Chamberlain said that he had understood from the negotiations of the previous week that the Government had decided to retain Irish representatives in Westminster and that he was completely surprised to learn differently from Gladstone's speech. Some of the morning papers, he said, hinted that Campbell-Bannerman would make further explicit amendments on behalf of the Government, but he would prefer further communications to be made through a public medium as private negotiations had so far resulted in nothing but misunderstanding.[5] Several others spoke, including Trevelyan

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1 Trevelyan to Chamberlain, 25 May 1886, Chamberlain, 220-1.

2 Ibid.

3 The Times, 13 May 1886, p. 5.

4 Daily Telegraph, 13 May 1886, p. 5.

5 The Times, 13 May 1886, p. 5.

and Caine.[1] Agreement was unanimous that, unless the Irish members were retained in Westminster, the bill must be opposed.[2] Hartington's name was well received and, according to The Times, the desire was expressed that the Whigs and Radicals should come together.[3] "The tone of the meeting was most cordial and resolute, and it was entirely unanimous," The Times reported, and added (with perhaps more optimism than accuracy) that those present strongly favoured a Hartington-Chamberlain government should the bill be defeated.[4]

Two days later Hartington held a gathering of dissidents at Devonshire House. Sixty-four attended (including twenty who had been present at Chamberlain's meeting) and nine others sent expressions of agreement with the purpose of the meeting.[5] Chamberlain took the major step not only of attending but of speaking.

Hartington explained his position at some length. He would vote, he said, against the second reading. The bill was bad as it stood, but the amendments proposed by the Government would make it worse. If, as was rumoured, the Government were to announce that the second reading was to be taken as an abstract resolution and the bill withdrawn until

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1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., 15 May 1886, p. 11.

the autumn, he would still vote against it, especially as the tension which must ensue, particularly in Ulster, might lead to serious consequences.[1] P. Rylands, Sir H. Vivian, H. Wiggin, R.B.Finlay, Sir H. Meysey-Thompson and one or two others spoke also. Meysey-Thompson said that he hoped Hartington, Chamberlain, and the other leaders would be able to formulate a policy. On that Chamberlain rose and said that the question of a policy was premature, but that the leaders were practically united on the course to be taken in dealing with the Government of Ireland and land purchase bills. He then elaborated on the inadequacy of the concessions offered by the Government, and added that even if all that had been demanded were to be conceded they would now have to consider the spirit of the concession. He agreed with Hartington in rejecting the proposal to consider the second reading as a resolution.[2] Next morning The Times wrote that the meeting proved the rejection of the home rule bill to be certain and proceeded to discuss the personnel available for a Hartington ministry for there was, it maintained, "no absolute necessity" for a general election.[3]

These bald descriptions of the Hartington and Chamberlain meetings give no indication of the reluctance and anxiety with which they were attended. This reluctance and anxiety is well

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1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

brought out in a letter which Sir E.W.Hamilton[1] wrote to Gladstone two days after the Devonshire House meeting. The letter read:

> . . . last night I came across Sir H. James, Sir Hussey Vivian and other seceders, with whom I had much talk. . .
>
> They referred much to the meeting at Devonshire House on Friday. The one wish, they said, which prevailed at the meeting was to find a bridge. They abhorred the idea of parting company with you; and they equally abhorred the outlook for themselves which separation from you involved:- they would be mere "catspaws" of the Tory party, they would be living from hand to mouth by Tory grace and favour and would be thrown over at any moment by their hateful allies. There was not a word fell at the meeting which contained the smallest trace of hostility towards you. On the contrary the tone of the meeting was such as would have gratified you had you been present. There was never an allusion to your name which was not cheered. Much significance was attached to Lord Hartington's concluding words: "Remember, gentlemen" - at least so they were in effect - "that the situation is changed and we must be prepared to face a far larger measure of concession than we ever dreamt of a few months ago."[2]
>
> I ventured to say: "That was all very well but what practical way out of the empasse had they to suggest?" The reply was :- "Only one - the abandonment of the Bill; and procedure by resolution which might include anything short of a Parliament in Dublin." . . .
>
> All, however, that I wish to dwell upon is the apparently strong feeling which exists among the secessionists for re-union. . . .[3]

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[1] He had been private secretary to Gladstone 1873-74 and 1880-85, and had again helped him when forming the government in Feb. 1886. He was a luke-warm home ruler (Sir E.W.Hamilton to Sir Henry Ponsonby, 25 May 1886, Add. Mss. 45725).

[2] The contemporary press had no reference to this statement by Hartington.

[3] Sir E.H.Hamilton to Gladstone, 16 May 1886, Add. Mss. 44191, f. 69.

A number of Liberals, of whom the more important were Samuel Whitbread,[1] Sir Henry Vivian,[2] Sir Joseph Pease,[3] Sir Ughtred Kay-Shuttleworth,[4] and Labouchere,[5] had turned to the idea of withdrawing the Government of Ireland Bill in favour of a general resolution. Whitbread approached Chamberlain on the matter and Chamberlain agreed to support a resolution in the terms of the memorandum which Gladstone had shown in February to those whom he had asked to take office.[6] Gladstone, as determined as ever upon securing a second reading for the bill, suddenly saw in the proposal a device for achieving that object.[7] He wrote asking John Bright to come to London as soon as possible.[8] Bright replied that he would

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1 S. Whitbread to Gladstone, 11 May 1886, Add. Mss. 44497, f. 199; and Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 219-20.

2 Memorandum by H. Gladstone, 18 May 1886, Add. Mss. 46114, f. 190.

3 Sir J. Pease to Gladstone, 14, and 20 May 1886, Add. Mss. 44497, ff. 223, and 246; Sir J. Pease to Spencer, 14 May 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp; and memorandum by H. Gladstone, 18 May 1886.

4 Sir U. Kay-Shuttleworth to Spencer, 13 May 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp; and Sir U. Kay-Shuttleworth to Granville, 14 May 1886, P.R.O. 30.29.22A.

5 Labouchere's speech, 18 May 1886, Hansard, cols. 1345-6.

6 Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 219-20.

7 On 13 May Gladstone wrote to Harcourt, "The state of Parliamentary opinion is now the main matter for consideration and the immediate question before us is, given a House of which a majority are favourable to the principle of our Bill, how to prevent this same House from throwing out the Bill on the 2nd R." (Copy, Add. Mss. 44548, p. 173).

8 Gladstone to Bright (copy), 12 May 1886, Add. Mss. 44548, p. 172.

arrive on the following day (the 14th) and that he believed Gladstone should withdraw the bill without putting it to a second division.[1] In London Bright was met by Whitbread who, acting in accordance with Gladstone's wishes,[2] proposed that the bill should be given its second reading and then should be "hung up for six months."[3] Next day Bright had a letter from Chamberlain urging him to press Gladstone to withdraw the bills and reconsider the subject.[4] At last on the 17th Bright gave Whitbread his findings. "I think there is only one thing which Mr. Gladstone can do wisely, and with any good result," he re-urged, "- that is to withdraw the Bill before the 2nd reading Division." He explained that he had not consulted Hartington as the Liberals at the Devonshire House meeting had unanimously agreed that under no circumstance would they vote for the second reading. But he had, he said, seen Caine (the unofficial radical unionist whip) who had confirmed that his group were opposed to Whitbread's proposal.[5]

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1 Bright to Gladstone, 13 May 1886, Add. Mss. 44113, f. 224 (Morley, III. 327-9).

2 Gladstone to Bright (copy), 14 May 1886, Add. Mss. 44548, p. 174; and Gladstone to S. Whitbread (copy), 14 May 1886, Add. Mss. 44548, p. 174.

3 The diaries of John Bright (edited by P. Bright), 541.

4 Chamberlain to Bright, 15 May 1886, Add. Mss. 43387, f. 24.

5 Bright to Whitbread, 17 May 1886, G.M.Trevelyan, The life of John Bright, 452-4.

On the 17th Chamberlain saw Hartington and tried to persuade him not to oppose a resolution, but to absent himself if necessary.[1] Hartington replied that he must give the idea further thought and consult others before committing himself.[2] Later, after the House was up, Chamberlain had at his own request a talk with Herbert Gladstone.[3] The conversation, judging from Herbert Gladstone's account, ranged over the political situation in general[4] and Chamberlain's motive in asking for it is not clear. Herbert Gladstone, it is interesting to note, gained from it the impression that Chamberlain appeared to be under an obligation to consult, if not to co-operate, with Hartington.[5]

On 18 May Hartington in a speech at Bradford firmly opposed the substitution of a resolution.[6] Next day Gladstone wrote to his chief whip that a resolution was no longer possible. He explained that it would require a general consent which could not be had now that Hartington had publicly opposed the adoption of a resolution, that the Irish would oppose such a course, and that the arguments against abstract

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1 Herbert Gladstone's minute on his conversation with Chamberlain on 17 May, 18 May 1886, Add. Mss. 46114, f. 190.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 The Times, 19 May 1886, pp. 11-12.

resolutions which might be taken verbatim from his own speeches on various questions would be most awkward.[1]

At a first glance it might seem that the withdrawal schemes sponsored by Gladstone, Chamberlain, and Bright had something in common and that they should have been able to reconcile them. There was, however, the fundamental difference that Gladstone's object was to pass the bill through the second reading while Chamberlain and Bright aimed at preventing it from reaching that stage.

The National Union of Conservative Associations met on 16 May and the opportunity was taken to fortify the resolution of dissident Liberals by the knowledge that in the ensuing election they would have an excellent chance of the Conservative votes in their constituencies. Salisbury and Hicks Beach both told the conference that it would be the duty of Conservatives to support Liberal Unionist candidates in Liberal Unionist constituencies which would not have been endangered had there been no Liberal split.[2] The Times commented that although the Conservative leaders could give no absolute pledge they should say plainly that no Liberal who voted against Gladstone's home rule bill would be attacked no matter what might be the prospect of success, or what might have been the provocation in the past.[3] The Conservative

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1 Gladstone to A. Morley (copy), 19 May 1886, Add. Mss. 44548, p. 178.

2 The Times, 17 May 1886, p. 6.

3 Ibid., p. 9.

leaders must have been fully aware of the substance in The Times criticism and in addition, if Churchill's report of the meeting of the Liberal Unionist peers at Derby House on 16 April is accurate, they had already given a much more comprehensive promise of Conservative support for Liberal Unionist candidates. Possibly they had refrained from the course which The Times advocated through deference to the views of the Liberal Unionists themselves for the Liberal Unionists still feared as much as ever any move which might suggest that they were the protégés of the Conservatives. Some at least of the Conservative leaders were aware of the Liberal Unionist attitude. In a speech a fortnight earlier Iddesleigh had strongly recommended Conservatives to partially efface themselves, and not to make difficulties for the Liberal Unionists either by abusing Gladstone or over-praising Hartington.[1]

The decision of the National Liberal Federation on 5 May and the determination of Gladstone to persevere with his schemes made the creation of a Liberal Unionist party machine an urgent necessity.[2] With this object a full meeting of the Liberal Unionist Committee, which had steadily grown since its

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1 Ibid., 30 April 1886.

2 Hartington's speech at the opening of the Ulster Reform Club on 5 Nov. 1885 contains what seems to be the first use of the term "Liberal unionist".

formation in April,[1] was arranged to take place on 22 May in the Westminster Palace Hotel under the chairmanship of Hartington. Chamberlain called a meeting of his supporters on the 20th to consider the new development. They met at a few minutes notice and as a result only thirty three attended.[2] Chamberlain, it was afterwards reported,[3] favoured joining the Committee, but the majority were against doing so in a body and the meeting decided that each person should join or not as he thought best.[4]

Hartington, opening the Westminster Palace Hotel meeting, said that Liberal Unionists would have to have an organisation if they were to counter the pressure of the caucuses and be able to fight successfully the general election which would probably follow.[5] Goschen moved the resolution establishing the new association which was to be known as the National Liberal Union. Its objects, he explained, would be to form local committees as had already been done in Glasgow, Nottingham, Liverpool, Derby and other places; to publish and circulate literature; and to raise party funds.[6] Other

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1 On 12 May The Times (p. 9) mentioned that forty M.Ps had now joined the Committee.

2 The Times, 21 May 1886, p. 10.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., 24 May 1886, p. 8.

6 Ibid.

speakers were Argyll, Derby, P. Rylands, J. Croffer, and H.R.Grenfell.[1] A general committee was then appointed.[2] It consisted of fifty nine people, including nineteen from the Commons and thirteen from the Lords.[3] Hartington was elected president and the offices and secretary of the initial committee were retained for the new body. Chamberlain did not join nor did any of his more pronounced followers.

The debate on the Government of Ireland Bill had been confined to the government nights (two per week) with the result that it was protracted for almost a month. The opposition bitterly protested that such a course was an expedient to enable the maximum amount of caucus and other unfair pressure to be applied to the unionist Liberals.[4] Efforts were made by the unionists to have the debate ended. Hicks Beach[5] and Hartington[6] each declared that the subject was exhausted and that the time had come for a division. Chamberlain, too, appears to have contemplated a similar statement, but on rising was ruled out of order.[7] Gladstone

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1 Ibid.

2 Elliot, II. 63.

3 The Times, 24 May 1886, p. 8.

4 e.g. Sir Michael Hicks-Beach's speech, 7 June 1886, Hansard, CCCVI, cols. 1202-3.

5 Hansard, CCCV, col. 1663.

6 Ibid., col. 1664.

7 Ibid., cols. 1664-5.

fell back on the precedent of the debate on the repeal of the Corn Laws, which lasted twelve nights, and although Hicks-Beach pointed out that it had been prolonged not by the supporters of the bill, but by its opponents,[1] he refused to give way.[2]

On the whole the opposition had much the best of the debate. On 4 June The Times gave as its opinion :

> . . . The most remarkable point to be noted in surveying the course of the discussion is the extraordinary paucity of independent support which Ministers have received. The defence of the measure . . . has been left almost exclusively in the hands of official personages and of Mr. Parnell's chosen subalterns.[3]

A fortnight earlier Brett had noted in his journal :

> . . . His [Gladstone's] support in the Cabinet and on the benches of the House of Commons has been weak. Morley alone had given him help. Up to a few nights ago not a single speaker had attempted to argue his case. Then Bryce's speech made a welcome break. . . .[4]

One cause of the poor defence by the Gladstonians was that so many of them were home rulers against the grain. Very many supported home rule simply as the lesser evil and a number for less creditable reasons. Bright may not have been literally correct in the figure, but he was expressing a truth, when in a letter to one of his constituents (31 May) he wrote that, if Gladstone's authority were withdrawn

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1 Ibid., col. 1841.

2 Ibid., cols. 1837-41.

3 The Times, 4 June 1886, p. 9.

4 R.B.Brett's Journal, 20 May 1886, Letters and journals of Reginald Viscount Esher, I. 126.

from the bills, he doubted if they would have, apart from the Nationalists, twenty supporters in the Commons.[1] Even more startling is Morley's expression of a similar opinion about the Cabinet. Some months later (15 February 1887) he told Dilke that, apart from Gladstone and himself, the only home rulers in the Cabinet had been Granville and Spencer.[2 & 3] Of these men, setting aside Gladstone, it is interesting that Morley believed home rule would bring no material advantage to Ireland,[4] that Spencer was a home ruler largely because he believed that all policies involving coercion in Ireland would sooner or later be sold by someone in return for the parliamentary support of the Nationalists,[5] and that Granville in his later years seems to have been content to follow Gladstone's lead in domestic policy. Even Childers, who had declared for home rule in the 1885 general election,[6] was very dissatisfied with Gladstone's bill. Cooper, the Liberal

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1 Bright to T. Grosvenor Lee, 31 May 1886, The Times, 2 June 1886, p. 10.

2 Dilke's memoir, Gwynn and Tuckwell, II. 267.

3 On 14 Aug. 1886 Morley remarked in a letter to Spencer, "Half of the late Cabinet are sceptical and cynical at bottom; especially Harcourt. . ." (Miscellaneous, Althorp).

4 Kate Courtney's diary, 18 April, and 6 June 1886 (she quotes conversations with Morley), Courtney, XXII.

5 See above p. 66-67.

6 Childers' speech, 12 Oct. 1885, The Times, 13 Oct. 1885; Childers to Gladstone, 27 and 28 September 1885, Add. Mss. 44132, ff. 183 and 186; and Lieut-Col. Spencer Childers, Life and correspondence of Hugh C.E.Childers, II, 232-4.

Unionist editor of the Scotsman, wrote in his memoir that during the general election of July 1886 Childers repeatedly told him that he thought Gladstone wrong and his home rule bill a bad one.[1] When Cooper pointed out the inconsistency of such views with a continued support of Gladstone, Childers replied that he feared great evils from a party split for no seceding party had ever been able to maintain a separate existence in British politics.[2]

By agreement the Conservatives had conceded that until after the critical division the foremost place both in the Commons and in the country should be taken by the Liberal Unionists.[3 & 4] In the Commons this aim was fully achieved for the majority of Liberal Unionist speeches were above average in ability. They had, as a rule, a firmer grasp of the constitutional problems of home rule than was usually shown either by their opponents or by the Conservatives. An explanation is that many of them had become Liberal Unionists because they had examined the constitutional conundrums unavoidable in any scheme of home rule and had been unable to find a solution. The men with the attitude, "Oh, these are

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1 C.A.Cooper, An editor's retrospect, 411.

2 Ibid.

3 Cecil, III. 302.

4 As early as 21 April Gladstone wrote to Morley, "Was there ever more egregious folly than that of the Separatist Liberals in taking all the difficulties and responsibilities upon themselves and allowing the Tories to remain virtually uncommitted".(Copy, Add. Mss. 44548, p. 148).

administrative details which you statesmen must deal with,"[1] had much less difficulty in throwing in their lot with Gladstone. Hartington aided by his national reputation for honesty and soundness of judgment, in particular, distinguished himself. One Gladstonian Liberal who sat through his speeches on the second reading has described them as "strong, sincere, arguing out with unerring force not prejudices, but fundamental difficulties and objections." "Such speeches," he added, "hit hard, told in every sentence, and meant steady transfer of votes to the Unionists."[2] As Morley verifies, never before during thirty years of parliamentary life had Hartington spoken with the same power.[3] Chamberlain, too, made a deep impression by the two speeches which he made on the second reading. Sir Richard Temple, Conservative member for Evesham, described them as remarkable productions of forceful argument and judicious moderation of expression, delivered with complete self-control and unruffled coolness amid constant interpellations and ejaculations.[4] "He never made speeches like that when he

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1 A remark of Jesse Collings as reported by Harcourt. (Harcourt to Hartington, 24 Dec. 1885, Gardiner, I. 553; and Harcourt to Chamberlain, 13 Dec. 1886, Gardiner, II. 13).

2 F.A.Channing, Memories of Midland politics, 1885-1910, 57-58.

3 Morley, III. 313.

4 Sir R. Temple, Letters and character sketches from the House of Commons, 142.

was on our side," Gladstone once complained to a friend. The friend, who was unusually candid, replied, "Yes, he did, but you never listened to them then."[1] Goschen, James, and Trevelyan each made an important contribution to the debate. The only Liberal Unionists of standing who did not speak were Bright and Courtney. Hicks Beach, Churchill, Balfour, and D.R.Plunkett were the most effective of the Conservative speakers. On the Gladstonian side only two men made a marked impression by their speaking. These were Morley and Sir Charles Russell.

In an effort to reassure as many as possible of the waverers,[2] Gladstone called a meeting at the Foreign Office for 27 May. The invitation was to all Liberal members who desired the establishment of a legislative body in Dublin for the management of affairs specifically and exclusively Irish.[3] Hartington's followers and certain other dissentients were thus excluded. A number of Chamberlainites

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1 I. Bulmer-Thomas, The party system in Great Britain, 36. Mr. Bulmer-Thomas was told this anecdote by Sir George Leveson Gower (private secretary to Gladstone, 1880-85, and Junior Lord of the Treasury, Feb.-July 1886).

2 Gladstone on the day of his Foreign Office meeting reckoned that the dissentients and waverers consisted of 8 Chamberlainites, 66 Hartingtonians and others, and 47 of whom he was hopeful. (Memorandum by Gladstone, 27 May 1886, Add. Mss. 44647. This is a cabinet memorandum and is closed to ordinary inspection, but is quoted by Mr. W.H.G.Armytage in "The railway rates question and the fall of the third Gladstone ministry," English Historical Review, LXV, 18-51).

3 The Times, 27 May 1886, p. 7.

attended, but Chamberlain was absent.[1]

Gladstone spoke for an hour. He explained that by the second reading the Government wished primarily to establish the principle of self-government and that a member who voted for the second reading would not be committed in any way as to the third reading, or the land purchase bill. He said that the principle having been established the Government did not intend to go further with the bill until the autumn session when either the committee stage would be entered, or the bill re-introduced in an amended form. The Government, he said, favoured the latter course. Gladstone reminded the meeting of the statements in his speech to the Commons on 10 May[2] that the Government was willing to admit Irish representatives to the Imperial Parliament for taxation involving Ireland, and favoured their admission on imperial and reserved matters, provided that a satisfactory scheme for achieving this could be evolved. He said that the Government had made a further study of the latter question and had concluded that a satisfactory scheme could be evolved.

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[1] He gave as the reason for his absence that he was pledged by public declarations to vote against the 2nd reading unless the Government conceded complete and continued Irish representation, which they had not done. (Chamberlain to Labouchere, 26 May 1886 (the letter was forwarded to H. Gladstone), J.L. Hammond, Gladstone and the Irish nation, 490).

[2] See above p. 141.

As a result it was now willing, he stated, to propose schemes for the admission of Irish representatives both for taxation, and for imperial and reserved matters.[1]

The meeting achieved its purpose. Many eagerly grasped at the opportunity of at least postponing the day of entering the wilderness. Before night no less than twenty dissentients said that they were satisfied.[2]

Chamberlain had a meeting of his followers shortly after the Foreign Office meeting. Apparently only thirty-six attended.[3] The Daily Telegraph reported that some of the men present claimed that Gladstone had virtually conceded their demand, but that others argued that they could not be certain of this.[4] The Birmingham Daily Post, on the other hand, wrote that the meeting, with the exception of two or three, considered that Gladstone's concessions did not amount to much.[5] The Daily Telegraph may have been nearer the mark for the meeting agreed that they should not attempt to come to a decision just then, but should re-meet on the following day when they would have had the advantage of having studied

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1 The Times, 28 May 1886, p. 10.

2 Morley, III. 334.

3 Birmingham Daily Post, 28 May 1886, p. 5. The Daily Telegraph (28 May 1886, p. 5) wrote that from forty to fifty attended, but the Birmingham Daily Post was more likely to have been accurately informed on matters affecting Chamberlain, and indeed, its account of the meeting reads very much as though officially inspired.

4 Daily Telegraph, 28 May 1886, p. 5.

5 Birmingham Daily Post, loc. cit.

Gladstone's speech in print.[1] This further meeting was later postponed until 31 May.

Chamberlain appeared to be on the brink of disaster and none knew it better than himself. W.S.Caine reported that thirty supporters were wobbling or had gone over.[2] In desperation Chamberlain suggested to Hartington, who informed Salisbury,[3] that rather than risk a heavy defeat Liberal Unionists and Conservatives should abstain from voting on the ground that to vote on a bill which was to be withdrawn or remodelled would be a farce.[4] Salisbury consulted certain of his colleagues and replied that they were unanimous in opposing the suggestion because, even if the Conservative members for Great Britain could be induced to adopt it, the Ulstermen would never consent to do so and in the constituencies the electors would conclude that the Union had been abandoned.[5] The suggestion was made also to a meeting of the Liberal Unionist Committee, but found no more favour there than with the Conservatives.[6]

The situation created by the Foreign Office meeting was

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1 Ibid., and Daily Telegraph, loc. cit.

2 Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 222.

3 Cecil, III. 305.

4 Salisbury to Hartington, 30 May 1886, Chats. 340. 1996.

5 Ibid.

6 Elliot, II. 72.

short lived. Next day Churchill and Hicks Beach in scathing attacks in the Commons pressed the Government to state definitely what they intended to do with the bill[1], and in the heated two hour debate Gladstone undid his achievement of the previous day. "Never, never," he declared, would he consent to the "reconstruction" of the bill. When he spoke of remodelling it he was referring to the one clause which dealt with Irish representation in the Imperial Parliament, he said.[2] The reaction was immediate and almost complete.

Chamberlain summoned the meeting for 31 May at which his followers were to decide their course on the second reading. As on 12 May the invitation was to Liberal members who favoured some form of autonomy for Ireland, but disapproved of the Government's billsas they stood.[3]

Chamberlain wrote to John Bright on 30 May earnestly requesting him to be present.[4] He declined, but sent a letter which was to have an importance he did not intend.[5] Bright had decided to vote against the bill, but thought that it would be best if others were to abstain, so that the bill, after being carried by a narrow majority, might meet

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1 Hansard, CCCVI, cols. 317-21, and 329-37.

2 Ibid., col. 326.

3 The Times, 1 June 1886, p. 13.

4 Chamberlain to Bright, 30 May 1886, Add. Mss. 43387, f. 27 (Garvin, II. 243-4).

5 Bright to Chamberlain, 1 June 1886, q.w.o., Garvin, II. 246.

a slow death in committee.

> My present intention, he wrote in his letter, is to vote against the second reading. Not having spoken in the debate, I am not willing to leave my view of the Bill or Bills in any doubt.
>
> But I am not willing to take the responsibility of advising others as to their course. If they can content themselves with abstaining from the division, I shall be glad - they will render a greater service by preventing the threatened dissolution than by compelling it. . . . I wish I could join you, but I cannot now change the path I have taken from the beginning of this unhappy discussion.[1]

The meeting took place in Committee Room 15 of the House of Commons.[2] Fifty-five members attended, including from fifteen to twenty who had been to meetings at Devonshire House.[3] Chamberlain explained that they could either vote against the second reading or else abstain from voting,[4] and impartially put the pros and cons for both courses. He said that he would follow whatever course the meeting chose, provided it was reached with tolerable accord.[5] Then without having attempted to sway the meeting he read Bright's letter.[6] After that only one course was possible. Bright's example must be followed and not his advice. Trevelyan,

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1 Bright to Chamberlain, 31 May 1886, Garvin, II, 244-5, and G.M.Trevelyan, The life of John Bright, 454-5.

2 Garvin, II. 245.

3 The Times, 1 June 1886, p. 13.

4 Chamberlain to John Albert Bright, 16 Jan. 1899, q.w.o., G.M.Trevelyan, op. cit., 455.

5 The Times, 1 June 1886, p. 13.

6 Chamberlain to John Albert Bright, 16 Jan. 1899.

Caine, R.B.Finlay, D.Davies, Sir J.Pease, Sir J.Goldsmid, Sir H.Vivian, P.Williams, and others spoke. Some were for abstention,[1] but the majority favoured direct opposition. Trevelyan urged that active opposition was both the logical and honest course.[2] The meeting was then asked for their views and thirty-nine held up their hands for voting against the bill, thirteen were for abstention, and three wished to support it.[3] Chamberlain now let it be known that he agreed with the majority[4] and on a further voting the number for direct opposition rose to forty-eight.[5]

The decision of Chamberlain's meeting destroyed the last hope of a successful second reading. Even the Daily News at once admitted it.[6] "There goes the man who killed the home rule bill," was Parnell's remark on seeing Chamberlain pass in the Lobby some weeks later.[7]

Next day Hartington held a similar meeting. Sixty members attended, including twenty who had been to Chamberlain's

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1 Ibid., and The Times, 1 June 1886, p. 13.

2 The Times, 1 June 1886, p. 13.

3 Garvin, II. 245.

4 Chamberlain to John Albert Bright, 16 Jan. 1899.

5 Garvin, II. 245. [The figures given by Garvin, The Times, Daily Telegraph, and Sir A.E.Pease (Elections and Recollections, 135) differ. The Times gives: 1st vote: 38 for direct opposition; 12 for abstention; and 3 for the bill, and 2nd vote: 44: 4; and 3. The Daily Telegraph gives: 1st vote: 38; 12; and 3, and 2nd vote: 47; 4; and 3. Sir A.E.Pease gives: 1st vote: 38; 12; and 5, and 2nd vote: 46; 4; and 3].

6 Daily News, 1 June 1886, p. 4.

7 R.B.O'Brien, The life of Charles Stewart Parnell, II. 158.

meeting.[1] Three others sent messages of approval.[2] Much less interest was aroused than on the previous day as people assumed that the result was a foregone conclusion. Hartington, Seely, and Goschen spoke.[3] At the voting fifty-eight favoured a direct vote against the second reading and two refused to commit themselves.[4]

Gladstone responded to the situation by repeating in clearer and more definite terms the points which he had made at the Foreign Office meeting. In correspondence, which was published in the press on 5 June, he re-emphasised that anyone voting for the second reading need only consider that they had voted for the general principle of an Irish legislature for Irish affairs, that the Government would hold themselves free to accept proposals made to them prior to the introduction of the autumn bill, and that the autumn bill would arrange for the representation of Ireland at Westminster upon imperial and revenue subjects.[5] Also, Gladstone wrote a letter to Sir Joseph Pease, too close to the division on the second reading to allow publication,[6] but which decisively influenced

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1 The Times, 2 June 1886.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 F.Fletcher Moulton to Gladstone, 4 June 1886, and Gladstone to F.Fletcher Moulton, 4 June 1886, The Times, 5 June 1886, p. 12.

6 Sir A.E.Pease, Elections and recollections, 108. (Sir A.E.Pease states that the letter was sent to Morley when he was writing the life of Gladstone and was not returned. Morley makes no reference to it in the life and there is no draft among the Gladstone papers).

Sir Joseph and some other members to vote for the second reading.[1] Once again Gladstone gave an assurance that a vote for the bill would commit one to nothing more than an acceptance of the principle.[2]

On the day following his decisive meeting Chamberlain spoke in the Commons. First he dealt with Gladstone's speech at the Foreign Office meeting. He maintained that the second reading could be treated neither as a resolution on the principle of an Irish legislature for Irish affairs as Gladstone had suggested, nor as a vote of confidence in the Government. The person who voted for the bill, he asserted, would be logically and honourably bound to vote for the second reading of a similar bill, or of the same bill should it be reintroduced in the autumn. He claimed that the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament could be retained unimpaired only if the Irish members continued to have "full, complete, and continuous representation" at Westminster. He laid emphasis on the question of Ulster and the danger of Roman Catholic domination over the Irish Protestants. He no longer, as in his speech of 9 April, suggested the adoption of a federal type constitution. Instead he now suggested that the relationship between the Dominion Parliament of Canada and a Canadian provincial assembly should be the model for the settlement of home rule.[3]

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1 Ibid., 109

2 Ibid.

3 Hansard, CCCVI, cols. 675-700.

The last evening of the debate on the second reading began at five o'clock on 7 June. Goschen was the first speaker. He opposed the suggestion that the vote on the second reading should be considered as no more than a resolution. He pointed out that members did not yet know whether the bill was still inseparably connected with the land purchase bill, or whether the Government had reached a decision on Ulster, or the nature of the plan, which Gladstone had foreshadowed at the Foreign Office meeting, for the admission of Irish representatives to the Imperial Parliament.[1] Of the remaining speakers the two most important were Parnell and Hicks-Beach. Parnell caused a sensation by intervening in Hicks-Beach's speech and stating that a member of the previous Conservative Ministry, when in office, had informed him that his Government intended to concede an Irish parliament with power to protect Irish industries.[2]

Gladstone's face was pallid as he closed the debate, but his voice had never sounded better.[3] He said that he had not promised to reconstruct the bill and hence was free to reconstruct it, but not bound to do so. He took it to be absolutely beyond dispute, he said, that what would be voted upon that night would be the principle of the bill, and not its particulars. He emphasised that members who voted for the principle would be entirely and absolutely uncommitted on

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1 Hansard, CCCVI, cols. 1145-68.

2 Hansard, CCCVI, cols. 1199-1200.

3 Morley, III. 338.

the specific provisions of the bill. He recalled that the Government had undertaken to provide for Irish representation in taxation and imperial questions. He did not recede, he said, from his statement on Ulster at the beginning of the debate, but could not see that any plan for Ulster had made serious or effective progress.

> You have power, you have wealth, you have rank, you have station, you have organisation, he declared. . . . As to the harvest of the future, I doubt if you have so much confidence, and I believe there is in the breast of many a man who means to vote against us tonight a profound misgiving, approaching even to a deep conviction, that the end will be as we foresee, and not as you do - that the ebbing tide is with you and the flowing tide is with us. Ireland stands at your bar expectant, hopeful, almost suppliant. . . .[1]

The division took place at one o'clock in the morning of 8 June and the Government was defeated by thirty votes. The figures were : ayes, 313; noes, 343, and the latter included ninety-three Liberals (not counting the independent Liberal Sir E. Watkin). A further seven Liberals walked out and three (including the two unionists C.P.Villiers and H.Bass) were ill.[2] Numerically the division was a record one for, apart from the Liberals noted, only two Conservatives, both of whom were ill, and the Nationalist Captain O'Shea did not

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1 Hansard, CCCVI, cols. 1215-40.

2 In the subsequent election three of the ten Liberals who did not vote were returned unopposed as Liberal Unionists, two after contests as Gladstonians, and five retired.

take part. (The Speaker A.W.Peel was a Liberal Unionist).

Gladstone decided on dissolution and later in the day carried the Cabinet with him.[1]

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[1] Gladstone to the Queen, 8 June 1886, Letters of Queen Victoria, 3rd Series, I. 143-4; and Morley, III. 341.

# CHAPTER IV

## THE LIBERAL SPLIT IN PARLIAMENT - AN ANALYSIS

Garvin reckoned that forty-six of the Liberals who voted against the Government were Chamberlainites.[1 & 2] In this he over-simplifies. Forty-five to fifty of them can with reasonable accuracy be described as Hartingtonians, but not more than twenty to twenty-five as Chamberlainites. The remainder of the ninety-three considered themselves neither Hartingtonians nor Chamberlainites, and in the main were men who believed that some form of home rule was inevitable, or desirable, but had been opposed to one or more aspects of the bills (especially the exclusion of the Irish representatives), and who had found in Chamberlain a champion of their views against those of Gladstone. A verification of the number of true Chamberlainites was provided little more than a week after the division when Chamberlain on forming a new party organisation, the National Radical Union, was able to induce no more than twenty or so members of Parliament to join it.

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1 Garvin, II. 250.

2 Arnold Morley informed Gladstone that a careful analysis of the 93 unionist Liberals showed that 67 of them were against the principle of the bill, that 5 were Chamberlainites, and that the remaining 21 were influenced mainly by electioneering considerations such as promises of no opposition. (A. Morley to Gladstone, 19 June 1886, Add. Mss. 44253, f. 13).

An unmistakable feature of the Liberal Unionist members of Parliament was their wealth.[1] An attempt to discover how much, or by what proportion, they were wealthier than the Gladstonian members is not feasible, but that they were on the whole wealthier is shown by an examination of what can be discovered of the financial position of individual members, the testimony of contemporaries, and the state of the relative party funds. This fact has led a number of people to jump to the conclusion that financial self-interest was an important factor in sending the Liberal Unionists into the division lobby against the Government of Ireland Bill.[2] The people who accept this view without inquiring further forget that a comparatively poor man can be as sensitive to the welfare of an industry or other undertaking as a rich man.

If financial self-interest were a major explanation of the formation of the Liberal Unionist Party one would expect to find that the majority of Liberal Unionist members had

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1 e.g. Thirty-nine Liberal Unionists contributed £131,395 to a special election fund prior to the general election of 1892. Three had acted as collecting agents for an area, but the remaining thirty-six contributed £104,100. Their subscriptions ranged from £500 to £20,000. (Wolmer (Liberal Unionist chief whip) to Duke of Devonshire, 5 Sept. 1892, Chats. 340. 2503, and 340. 2503A).

2 e.g. E. Halévy, History of the English people. Epilogue, I. 16. [Halévy was so carried away by this assumption that his comment on the fact that the 140 Gladstonians returned in 1895 for England and Wales contained 59 business men (42%) and the 22 Liberal Unionists 8 business men (36%) was "the large proportion of business men among the Liberal Unionists reveals the true character of the revolt"! Halévy obtained his figures from the Constitutional year book for 1896].

TABLE I.

Economic interests of the Liberal Unionist and Gladstonian Liberal members of Parliament, June 1886.

In this table the Liberal Unionist and Gladstonian Liberal members with a particular interest are expressed as a percentage (to the nearest whole number) of the total number of their respective party in the Commons. The Liberal Unionists are reckoned to number ninety-seven members, i.e. the ninety-three who voted against the Government, the three who did not vote but who subsequently stood for election as Liberal Unionists, and the Speaker, A.W.Peel.

An inquiry of this kind cannot, of course, be exhaustive and is handicapped by shortcomings in the sources on which it is based. The figures in this table were obtained from :

Dod's parliamentary companion

Dictionary of national biography

Who's who

Who was who, 1897 - 1928

Obituaries in The Times

Directory of directors

The new House of Commons (published by The Times)

The popular guide to the House of Commons and record of the election of 1886 (published by Pall Mall Gazette)

Bradshaw's railway shareholders' guide

Burke's landed gentry

Bateman's great landowners

F. Boase, Modern English biographies

Men of the time

TABLE I (CONTINUED).

| Interests | % of L.U.s with a particular interest[1] | % of G.L.s with a particular interest |
|---|---|---|
| Land | 37% | 32% |
| Finance and insurance | 17% | 11% |
| Railways | 24% | 12% [2] |
| Manufacturing, engineering and mining | 31% | 26% |
| Textiles | 6% | 5% |
| Merchants | 6% | 12% |
| Collieries | 4% | 4% |
| Shipping | 4% | 2% |
| Brewers and distillers | 2% | 2% |
| Newspapers, literary, and academic | 14% | 16% |
| Ex-Home, ex-Diplomatic, and ex-Indian Service | 3% | 3% |

[1] As there were only 97 Liberal Unionists the figures in this column are especially subject to the idiosyncrasies of individuals.

[2] This figure differs from Mr. P.M.Williams' estimate because his includes only directors. (Mr. P.M.Williams, "Public opinion and the railway rates question", English Historical Review, LXVII. 37-73).

different economic interests from the majority of the Gladstonians, and further, that their interests were ones specially threatened by Gladstone's bills. An examination of the economic interests of the two groups does not reveal anything so definite.

Apart from the merchant interest, the four major economic interests in both parties were land, manufacturing, railways, and finance.[1] In each of three of these about five per cent, and in railways twelve per cent more Liberal Unionists had an interest than had Gladstonians. This is less significant than it first appears because it was partly due to a larger proportion of the Liberal Unionists having their fortunes divided among two, three, or more economic interests,[2] and also because, being in the main wealthier men, they held a greater number of company directorships. One can discover the company directors with comparative certainty; but even exhaustive research leaves undetected many important economic interests of men who held no directorship. This is especially true of railways and quite possibly even the twelve per cent is to be explained almost entirely by it for at that time railway stock was one of the most common forms of investment -

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[1] See TABLE I, <u>supra</u> pp. 174-5.

[2] A table based on the primary economic interest of each member would be valuable, but unfortunately it is not possible to compile one for a whole party or even for a sufficient portion of a party to be of use.

the most common, it was said, after consols.

The Liberal Unionists and the Gladstonians had each a few men who owned estates in Ireland or were related to the Irish landlord class, but in both parties the overwhelming majority of land owning M.P.'s had their property in Great Britain. Many of them admitted that only by some form of land purchase could Ireland's agrarian problems be solved. Further, those of them who were opposed to Irish land purchase were well aware that they would not stop it by going against Gladstone for in the previous year one of the first acts of the Conservative Government had been the Ashbourne Act - a substantial land purchase measure. Ireland provided an important market for finished goods and the heavy industries of Belfast for iron and steel. Nevertheless, one doubts if even the complete loss of the Irish market would have brought financial disaster to any sizeable number of Liberal Unionists. No Liberal Unionist appears to have had an interest in the Irish railways,[1] and one cannot feel that the railway interests of Great Britain could have influenced the division list on 8 June.[2] Financiers' interests were a different matter.

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1 Bradshaw's railway shareholders' guide, 1886, passim.

2 See Mr. W.H.G.Armytage, "The railway rates question and the fall of the third Gladstone ministry", English Historical Review, LXV, 18-51, for the suggestion that Mundella's Railway and Canal Traffic Bill (introduced 12 March) was decisive in deciding many Liberals to oppose the Government on 8 June, and Mr. P.M.Williams, "Public opinion and the Railway rates question in 1886", ibid., LXVII, 37-73, for a refutation of the suggestion.

Very many Irish landlords, hard pressed by the failure of so many tenants to pay rents and by rent reductions imposed by the land courts, had borrowed heavily and especially from a number of London firms. The total sum of these loans cannot be known, but Spencer, who had had a better opportunity of forming an opinion than most, credited the contemporary estimate of one hundred million.[1]

The conclusion to be drawn would seem to be that Liberal Unionists interested in finance and certain branches of manufacturing may have been influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by financial self-interest, but that, with the possible exception of the financiers, few of them were likely to have been decisively influenced. Very many of the Liberal Unionists were first and foremost politicians and their prime interest was not an economic one but their political career. For such people the decision to secede meant casting away their most cherished ambitions. Of course, on the other hand a number of those among the rank and file whose political ambition was limited to the mere possession of a seat in Parliament were given a direct incentive to become unionists by the hope or promise of Conservative support in their constituencies. A few may have succumbed to the temptation: 59% of the Liberals who divided against the home rule bill were county members compared with 53% of those who supported it. The counties contained a substantial Conservative vote, and in addition

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[1] Spencer to Rosebery (draft), 30 Dec. 1885, Miscellaneous, Althorp.

the peers and territorial magnates, now in the main unionist, had still much influence in the counties despite the secret ballot.[1] Of the twenty-seven Liberal Unionists (not counting Watkin) who were returned unopposed, nineteen were for county seats and only eight for boroughs.

Of much importance in deciding many Liberals to oppose Gladstone were the almost insoluble problems inherent in any form of home rule of the kind which he had proposed. To take but the most important of these problems - that of Irish representation at Westminster - how could his scheme be permanent or satisfy Irish nationalistic aspirations when it authorised the Imperial Parliament to fix three-quarters of Ireland's revenue (customs and excise) and to appropriate some forty per cent of the proceeds, and yet excluded all Irish representation from the Imperial Parliament? Once again the cry would be "taxation without representation". On the other hand, to admit Irish representatives and to allow them a full say in the purely domestic legislation of Great Britain would be unfair to Great Britain, and especially as they would be pretty certain to use their voting power on Great Britain's domestic issues to extort concessions on Irish matters. One solution (and the one suggested by Gladstone to the Foreign Office meeting) would have been to admit Irish representatives only on reserved (including Irish customs and

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[1] See below pp. 238-9.

excise), and imperial matters. However, this raised, first the very difficultproblem of what was to be considered an imperial matter, and secondly the question of what was to happen if the government were in a majority on British domestic legislation and, owing to the Irish vote, in a minority on Imperial matters, or else vice versa. One suggestion for reducing the ability of Irish members to interfere with the domestic legislation of Great Britain was that, in consideration of being allowed to deal with her own domestic affairs in Dublin, Ireland should have a reduced representation in Westminster. The proposal was a very unsatisfactory one, for while it might have lessened the ability of the Irish members to interfere, it would not have abolished it and would have deprived Ireland of part of her rightful say in all matters not dealt with by the Dublin legislature.

Gladstone claimed that the Government of Ireland Bill ensured the unimpaired supremacy of the Imperial Parliament, but many Liberals Unionists were not convinced. They admitted that his claim might be correct in constitutional theory, but they felt that Chamberlain was nearer to reality when he pointed out that the Imperial Parliament had already a similar supremacy over the colonial legislatures, and that she dare not exercise it in any criminal, agrarian, religious, or educational matter within a colony lest it should at once throw off its allegiance.[1]

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[1] Hansard, CCCVI, col. 683.

The crime, brutality and open resistance to law and order in Ireland, the irresponsible obstruction of the Nationalist M.P.s in Parliament, their rigid party discipline, their petit bourgeois origins,[1] and Parnell's speeches of the previous autumn all contributed to convince many Liberal Unionists that a Dublin parliament would injureGreat Britain and be disastrous for Ireland.[2] The opinion which Courtney had expressed in the previous December could almost be termed representative. ". . . England would suffer, but Ireland would be nigh ruined. None of the checks that have been proposed seem to be of any use.. . . Property, education, trade, pauperism, the judicial bench, the police - under each of these heads I see unchecked danger."[3] Liberal Unionists, despite Gladstone's protests to the contrary,[4] claimed that the elaborate safeguards to prevent

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1 The occupational and social backgrounds of the Nationalist M.P.s in 1886 were in the main similar to what they were post 1892, a detailed study of which is given in F.S.L. Lyons, The Irish Parliamentary Party, 1890-1910, chap. IV.

2 The Daily News in one of its more independent moods wrote: "The state of affairs in Ireland during the past ten years, the brutal murders, the houghing of cattle, the cowardly boycotting, and the general state of terrorism in which society has lived owing to the machinations of secret associations, have aroused a feeling of deep indignation and disgust in the English mind. Beyond this is the conduct of the Irish members in the House of Commons. A nation that has seen the traditions of its historical parliament traduced, its authority defied, and the House of Commons turned into a bear-garden in the name of Home Rule can scarcely be expected to espouse the cause thus tainted." (12 April 1886, p. 4).

3 Courtney to Miss Tod (draft), 30 Dec. 1885, Courtney, XIX, p. 26.

4 e.g. Hansard, CCCIV, col. 1534.

exploitation of any minority by the proposed Irish legislature were a direct admission by Gladstone of the genuineness of their fears.

Few Liberal Unionists appear to have laid much store by Parnell's assurance that he believed the Irish Nationalists would accept the Government of Ireland Bill as a final settlement.[1] They remembered the more extreme statements of Nationalists in the past, and noted that on their own admission the Nationalists were keenly dissatisfied with the financial provisions, the arrangement for the two orders, and other aspects of the bill. They felt that Parnell had spoken with more truth when in January of the previous year he had declared, "but no man has the right to fix the boundary to the march of a nation,"[2] or when in November he had said, "we will never accept, either expressly or implied, anything but the full and complete right to arrange our own affairs and make our land a nation, to secure for her, free from outside control, the right to direct her own course among the people of the world."[3]

Nevertheless, many of the Liberal Unionists who held these opinions about the Nationalists probably would have consented

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1 Hansard, CCCIV, col. 1134; and CCCVI, col. 1173.

2 The Times, 22 Jan. 1886, p. 10.

3 Freeman's Journal, 4 Nov. 1885, p. 4.

(no matter how reluctantly) to some form of home rule had Ireland spoken with one voice. But she did not. The Irish unionists were bitterly and resolutely opposed to a Dublin parliament, and they included almost all the Irish Liberals, who in 1880 had returned fourteen Liberal members to Parliament. Also, Irish Protestants of all denominations were staunchly unionist and this was a fact which Free Churchmen and Scottish Presbyterians could not entirely ignore.

Then there was the question of Ulster. The arguments which the Nationalists advanced for the withdrawal of Ireland from the direct rule of the Imperial Parliament were equally valid as arguments for the exclusion of unionist Ulster from the direct rule of a Dublin parliament. But of more importance than the logic of their case was the dour determination of the Ulstermen to resist home rule to the uttermost and, if need be, by force. Very many Liberals refused to credit this fact, and the more especially as they tended to equate the Ulster unionists with the Orange Order, an organisation with a well established reputation for reactionary views and violence of language. The Daily News wrote, "But we have heard all this bluster from the North of Ireland before. It has accompanied, like some undertone of stage thunder, all the great acts of justice which Mr. Gladstone has done for Ireland."[1] The Liberals who were informed on the

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[1] Daily News, 21 May 1886, p. 4.

matter knew better and the problem of Ulster seriously worried even some of the stauncher Gladstonians. Bryce, who had been born in Belfast and had relations in Ulster, was one such person.[1] Another was Sir A.E.Pease who recorded in his recollections that the unionists would confront Gladstonians with, "Now! Are you going to shoot down the Ulstermen?" and, "Do you think the army will obey your orders?" The Gladstonians, he admitted, could not answer these questions and at best replied that they had no intention of shooting Ulstermen.[2]

Although the cry of "popery and wooden shoes" was a thing of the past, anti-Roman Catholic prejudice was still very much alive. Even hard-headed realists like Chamberlain appear to have believed that Irish Protestants would be subjected to injustices and unfair pressures under a Dublin legislature.[3] Most Liberals seem to have agreed that Irish Protestants would be safe from open persecution[4] and that discrimination against them was likely to be more subtle. Many especially feared that the Roman Catholic Church would capture control of the Irish state system of education and use it for the advancement of its own sectarian interests.[5]

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1 H.A.L.Fisher, James Bryce, I. 221.

2 Sir A.E.Pease, Elections and recollections, 131.

3 Chamberlain to a Welsh correspondent, The Times, 28 April 1886, p. 7; and Chamberlain's speech, 1 June 1886, Hansard, CCCVI, cols. 687-8.

4 e.g. Bright. Bright to R.B.O'Brien in conversation, R.B.O'Brien, Charles Stewart Parnell, II. 146.

5 e.g. Goschen (Hansard, CCCVI, cols. 1155-6); or A.Craig Sellar (ibid., CCVI, cols. 731-9); or A.B.Winterbotham (ibid., CCCVI, cols. 886-7).

Even the pro-Gladstonian Inquirer was uneasy and admitted that the sectarianism which used public funds for its own ends in England might be expected with doubled vigour in Ireland. "The reprisals of one sect upon the other lie upon the surface," it wrote. ". . . But the slow processes which mould the temper of a nation are more serious and lasting in their effects."[1]

The property qualifications which were to govern the election of the First Order of the Irish legislature had few friends among Liberals. Sir Joseph Pease told the Commons that they were a return to an antiquated system which long ago had been exploded at Westminster.[2] Chamberlain described them as odious and hateful to every true Liberal, and contrary to the practice and principles of British representative government.[3]

The fear that a Dublin parliament would adopt a policy of tariff discrimination against Great Britain was widely established in all classes. It had found expression following Parnell's speeches of the previous autumn. Gladstone's bill denied the proposed Irish legislature power to impose customs and excise duties, but the men who believed that the Nationalists would use the measure as a stepping stone to greater independence

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1 Inquirer, 1 May 1886, p. 282.

2 Hansard, CCCVI, col. 1071.

3 Speech at Birmingham, 21 April 1886, The Times, 22 April 1886, p. 10.

continued to be much influenced by the dread of Irish tariffs on Great Britain's goods. The suggestion that an Irish legislature would eventually build up industries to compete with those of Great Britain appears to have been rarely taken seriously. Numerous Liberal Unionists pointed out that the question of a separate Irish legislature had not been before the electors in any real sense during the previous general election, and maintained that in a democratic country no scheme of the importance of Gladstone's ought to have been brought forward without a clear mandate from the electors.[1] There was no evidence to show that Gladstone had been a convert to home rule for some time before the general election, and not a few Liberal Unionists firmly believed that, had the Nationalists' votes not been essential for office, he would

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[1] e.g. Hartington said in his speech of 9 April: "the country had no sufficient warning - I think I may say the country had no warning at all - that any proposals of the magnitude and vastness of those which were unfolded. . . were to be considered in the present Parliament. . . I am perfectly aware that there exists in our Constitution no principle of the mandate. . . . But . . . I maintain that there are certain limits which Parliament is morally bound to observe . . ." (Hansard, CCCIV, col. 1244).

never have taken up the Nationalists' cause.[1] Also, the speed with which Gladstone had produced the bills and his subsequent willingness to see them modified had not helped to inspire confidence in their soundness.[2]

Strangely enough, the motives of the Liberals who stood by Gladstone have seldom been suspected in the same way as those of the unionist Liberals. Observers have tended to assume that the Gladstonians were taking the natural and obvious course and have inquired no further. Nevertheless, in studying the events of Gladstone's third ministry the fact which impresses one most is not that between ninety and

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[1] None of the speakers in the debate on the second reading dared to level this accusation at Gladstone with the bluntness used by some of the unionist press. e.g. The Dublin Review of April 1886 (p. 394) wrote: "Never before in the history of English political life has any great leader of party, with such cynical indifference to the judgment of posterity, with such total disregard of his own repeated and emphatic assurances, ventured to reverse his policy in order to secure a short-lived tenure of office. We live in an age when political morality is enforced upon mere electors by fine and imprisonment, but sin in high places goes unpunished, and the bribery of place and power is permitted to dispose of the destinies of a nation". The Times stated that if eight-five Parnellites had not been returned Gladstone's Government of Ireland Bill would never have been heard of (21 April 1886, p. 9). Later it was to write of the greatness of Gladstone's moral fall in taking up home rule for office (4 July 1886, p. 9).

[2] Sir J. Pease said in his speech of 4 June: "I desire . . . to point out how hastily this Bill has been brought forward; and the same is the case with regard to the changes which have been made in it already. That, I think, is one reason why the Government should look again at the whole measure, in order that they may be able to bring in a Bill which the House generally will desire to pass ".(Hansard, CCCVI, col. 1073).

a hundred Liberals left Gladstone, but that over two hundred and thirty remained with him. In the previous autumn quite a few of them had openly denounced the Nationalist claim for home rule and Gladstone himself considered that not more than about one third of the Liberals in the Commons could have been induced to oppose a declaration in favour of the legislative Union during the debate on the address prior to the fall of Salisbury's administration.[1] Further, many of the Liberals who were not opposed to the principle of home rule were very dissatisfied with the provisions of the Government of Ireland Bill.

The most important factor in the retention of the Gladstonians to their allegiance was the prestige and personal authority of Gladstone. Unionists bitterly denounced it as gross servility on the part of his followers and the Gladstonians themselves paid tribute to it. On the 30th of the previous December Spencer had considered that Gladstone had no prospect of a following sufficient to justify his taking up home rule.[2] At that date Spencer had believed that Rosebery, Granville, Morley, and he were the only Liberals likely to join an administration committed to home rule.[3]

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1 An account of the situation in Jan. 1886 written by Gladstone in the autumn of 1897. Quoted, Morley, III. 284-5.

2 Spencer to Rosebery (copy), 30 Dec. 1885, Miscellaneous, Althorp.

3 Ibid.

A few days earlier Balfour had remarked that it was manifest that Gladstone could not form a government without Hartington, Goschen, Chamberlain, or Dilke.[1] Looking back on the same period twenty two years later the Radical Labouchere, who cannot be accused of being overawed by Gladstone and who had better opportunities for knowing than most, wrote:

> . . . What most surprised me in the story of Mr. Gladstone's first Home Rule Bill was the wondrous influence that he himself wielded.
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> . . . When the Parliament of 1885 was elected Mr. Gladstone had against him on the Irish question not only a majority of the Liberal Party, but very nearly all those from whom he had to select a ministry. . . . One of them said to me,"Who will he get to serve under him? Is the Cabinet to consist of him, Joe Cowan, Parnell and you?"[2]

Among the Midland members, where Gladstone's personal influence was equalled by that of Chamberlain and Bright, unionism carried the day. Yet this very fact, while showing that Gladstone's personal influence had limitations, also indicates how decisive it may have been with the other Liberals.

The Gladstonians' second great asset was the widespread conviction that Irish home rule was inevitable.[3] The events

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[1] Balfour to Salisbury, 23 Dec. 1885, Blanche E.C.Dugdale, Arthur James Dugdale, I. 94-95.

[2] H. Labouchere, "The secret history of the first home rule bill," Truth, 14 Oct. 1908, p. 879.

[3] The British Quarterly Review of 1 April (p. 402) noted: "They [the Conservatives] are mainly accountable for the extraordinary change of feeling which constitutes one of Mr. Gladstone's chief elements of strength. A few months ago the very mention of Home Rule would have been received with a howl of execration: today it seems to be half assumed that some measure there must be . . ."

of Salisbury's administration had established the belief widely and firmly that the Conservatives when in office had at least toyed with home rule and probably had been but "beaten to it" by Gladstone.[1] Such a belief undermined all confidence that the Conservatives could be relied upon to refuse home rule when they should find themselves again in circumstances similar to those of their last administration. Even Hartington as late as the following March still felt it necessary to ask Salisbury for an assurance that the Conservatives "would resist Home Rule to the end".[2] The conviction that home rule was inevitable - that if the Liberals did not grant it the Conservatives some day would - sapped the will to resist in many Liberals who otherwise might have opposed Gladstone's policy. Spencer had been decisively influenced by "the Tory surrender last July",[3] and Harcourt, when in the previous December he was weighing up his attitude to home rule, had declared that home rule had been a lost cause from the moment the Tories had sold the pass to Parnell for office.[4]

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1 e.g. After Churchill's speech at Belfast in February the Spectator (27 Feb. 1886, p. 273) remarked: "He has, like his chief, utterly abandoned the view that Ireland should have Home-Rule, though he undoubtedly intended something of the kind when he came into power." Or to take an illustration from the Gladstonian side - on 20 April the Daily News (p. 4) commented that the Conservatives' chief objection to Gladstone's scheme was that it had forestalled their own.

2 Cecil, III. 296.

3 Spencer to Lansdowne (copy), 2 Feb. 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp.

4 Harcourt to Chamberlain, 25 Dec. 1885, q.w.o., Garvin, II. 147.

And here are two examples of the same attitude from the rank and file of the party: A W.P.Redington wrote to Herbert Gladstone on 10 April, "I fear the Bill is doomed . . . and in a few years Lord Randolph will bring in a Home Rule scheme and prove that the Tories were always Ireland's best friends";[1] and in conversation with Sir A.E.Pease on 17 April Milman, the Clerk to the House of Commons, said that he hoped Gladstone's Irish bills would go through as the Tories would pass worse ones if they did not. Pease adds that a week earlier Milman had been down on him hot for saying a word in favour of home rule.[2] In the debate (9 April) Morley had taunted the Conservatives that perhaps they would pass their home rule bill should the Government's one be defeated.[3] Two days before the final division the Daily News, probably with an eye to the waverers, had written that Salisbury's seven months in Downing Street and Carnarvon's seven months in Ireland made home rule inevitable, and that were Salisbury again Prime Minister he would be intriguing once more through Churchill for the Irish vote within half a year.[4] The belief that the Conservatives might attempt "to dish" the Gladstonians by

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1 W.P.Redington to H.Gladstone, 10 April 1886, Add. Mss. 46038, f. 99.

2 Sir A.E.Pease, Elections and recollections, 127.

3 Hansard, CCCIV, col. 1264.

4 Daily News, 5 June 1886, p. 4.

taking up home rule died slowly. Even Granville in the following December still thought such an outcome possible.[1]

No democratically minded person could ignore Ireland's return of eighty five home rule members in contrast to eighteen unionists and it was a fact which weighed heavily with Liberals. As an Irish Unitarian minister, and home ruler, expressed it, "Those Englishmen who make light of the expression of opinion delivered by the Irish people make light of the spirit of that constitution which is the bulwark of their own freedom."[2] In addition, Liberals could not forget their support in the past of the causes of Italians, Armenians, and other dominated peoples. It was widely recognised that if the Irish nationalists did not gain home rule by constitutional methods they were likely to resort to violence and unconstitutional methods, which in turn would necessitate severe coercion. Coercion had always been a humiliating and loathsome expedient for Liberals and numbers of them considered that an Irish legislature would be a lesser evil than the adoption by Great Britain of what might prove to be an almost permanent system of government by coercion.[3]

Some feared that if Gladstone's policy were defeated the Nationalist members would ruthlessly avenge themselves by

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1 Granville to Spencer, 9 Dec. 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp.

2 Rev. R.A.Armstrong in, Ireland : a book of light on the Irish problem (edited A.Reid), 173.

3 e.g. Rosebery (Rosebery to Spencer, 31 Dec. 1885, Miscellaneous Althorp), or Sir Edward Grey (G.M.Trevelyan, Grey of Falloden, 33).

obstructing and sabotaging the working of Parliament on all possible occasions. In his speech of 9 April Morley declared that if he were about to refuse an Irish legislature he would be all the more anxious to keep the Irish members out of Westminster, because within it they would be in the strongest position for dealing a deadly blow at imperial policy, and the authority and efficiency of Parliament.[1] Members who considered Morley's fear to be excessive, nevertheless, could scarcely have avoided being a little tempted by the prospect of losing the Irish members when they remembered the long night sittings and the slow progress of business when the Nationalists had obstructed in the past.

One feature of the Liberal split was that while the average ages of the Liberal Unionist and the Gladstonian members was almost the same (52.15 and 51.4 years) the Liberal Unionists had a considerably higher average of Parliamentary service (8.57 years compared with the Gladstonian 5.25). More arresting still - twenty eight Liberal Unionist members (or 29% of the party) had not been in a previous parliament while the figure for the Gladstonians was 109 (or 46%). The obvious explanation is that newcomers, having neither experience nor contacts within the Commons, were much more prone to fall under the spell of Gladstone and to drift with the majority. This almost certainly was to a large extent true, but an additional factor was that the newcomers contained

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1 Hansard, CCCIV, col. 1277.

a higher proportion of men from the professional and lower middle classes as well as ten direct representatives of labour, and that these men had a special interest in standing by Gladstone. Contemporaries were much impressed that so many Gladstonians were drawn from these classes. For example the Spectator on 1 May wrote:

> . . . if Mr. Gladstone carries his scheme through the House of Commons it will involve this amongst all its other mischievous results - that it will divide dangerously and ominously the Liberals of the working classes from the Liberals of the more educated class, and leave the former without associates of a kind to whose larger knowledge the artisans and labourers can look up.[1] It will be the beginning of a social split.. . .

Gladstone himself in his letter to his constituents on 1 May claimed that the opponents of his bills consisted "of class, and the dependants of class"[2] - a claim which he reiterated when closing the debate on 7 June.[3] One indication of this class factor was that 49% of the Liberal Unionists in the Commons had been educated at a public school or at Oxford or Cambridge, and only 33% of the Gladstonians. Also, pointing in the same direction was the higher proportions of Free Church M.P.s who were Gladstonians.[4]

The more plebeian Liberals had strong inducements to remain with Gladstone. They were intensely interested in

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1 Spectator, 1 May 1886, p. 566.

2 Gladstone to the electors of Midlothian, 1 May 1886, The Times, 4 May 1886, p. 5.

3 Hansard, CCCVI, col. 1239.

4 See APPENDIX I, pp. 426-30.

disestablishment, and in temperance, education, taxation, labour, and other reforms, and they represented or were under pressure from the forces which before the end of the next parliament were to force the "Newcastle Programme" of reforms upon the Gladstonian party. These men by opposing Gladstone and the party would have ruined not only their own political careers, but, in so far as they could judge at the time, would by their action have given their support to the indefinite postponement of the reform legislation which was their cherished object. In this connection perhaps it is significant that all twelve of the direct representatives of labour became Gladstonians. On the other hand, the fact that the Radical Unionists, too, were tempted by these inducements to follow the party line is a caution that they can be over-estimated. Nevertheless, one feels that the following account written by Samuel Smith, Liberal member for Flintshire, could equally well have been written by many Gladstonians:

> . . . I had to settle whether to follow Mr. Gladstone and the main current, or to join the Liberal Unionists. . . . It gradually became clear to me that I should go with the main body. I had been a Liberal all my life. I was deeply interested in Temperance and Social Reforms, and looked for that to the Liberal Party. I wholly sympathised with the underlying motive for Home Rule, viz., reparation for past misgovernment of Ireland, and a longing to exchange conciliation for coercion. It was one of those cases in life where one has only a choice of difficulties. All one can do is to take the course which seems to offer least difficulty. . . .[1]

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[1] S. Smith, My life work, 230-1.

The Free Churchmen were especially determined on securing disestablishment, and temperance, and educational reform. Also, some of them, as a result of social and historical factors, had an emotional antagonism to the Conservative party which made it difficult for them to consider anything savouring of an alliance with it. At the time of the division on the second reading of the Government of Ireland Bill there were at least fifty-seven Free Church Liberal members in the Commons.[1] Forty-six of them became Gladstonians, ten became Liberal Unionists, and one withdrew from politics without having committed himself. The ten Liberal Unionists consisted of Chamberlain, his brother, and his brother-in-law; Bright, and his brother-in-law; W.S.Caine, who eventually transferred to the Gladstonians; F.Taylor, who was a brewer and may have been already partly estranged from the party by the militancy of the strong temperance section; and three others.

Caucus pressure has been mentioned earlier, but lest it should be underestimated, must be mentioned again.[2] Liberals who were socially undistinguished and at best only moderately wealthy were more than ordinarily exposed to it. Many of them had no very special claim on their constituency and fully realised, as also did the party organisers, that their place

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1 See APPENDIX I, pp. 426-30.

2 On 19 May the Daily News (p. 5) noted: "The position of the Liberal members who are resolved to vote against the Bill is becoming more and more embarrassing. The overwhelming majorities by which the Liberal associations pass resolutions in support of the Government indicate the course which the great mass of the Liberal electors will take when it comes to their turn to vote for the Bill."

could normally be filled without much difficulty. An indication of how influential the caucus pressure was is provided by the private warning which Chamberlain gave Hartington on 4 April - that is even before the National Liberal Federation had thrown in its lot with Gladstone. The members, Chamberlain informed Hartington with perhaps some exaggeration, were under so much pressure from the constituencies that a motion of rejection which gave any excuse to the waverers would cost the opponents of the bill fifty votes at least.[1]

An examination of the economic interests of the Gladstonians reveals that they can have been little motivated by financial self-interest.[2] They had more merchants than had the Liberal Unionists, but this was largely due to the social composition of the Gladstonians. The only obvious financial motive which may have influenced a few was the hope that by supporting the bills the expense of an immediate election might be avoided, for although the Act of 1883 had much reduced election expenses, they were still important to the less wealthy candidates.

As neither of Gladstone's bills reached the Lords, party allegiance did not have the same urgency with the Liberal peers as it did with the Liberals in the Commons. Only peers who

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1 Chamberlain to Hartington, 4 May 1886, Chats. 340. 1989 (q.w.o., Garvin, II. 222).

2 See TABLE I, <u>supra</u> pp 174-5.

TABLE II.

The Liberal split in the House of Lords.

The only contemporary publication which in listing the Liberal peers attempted to distinguish the Gladstonians and the Liberal Unionists was The Constitutional Year Book. Its classification appears to have been as accurate as was possible at the time, for when the three different categories of Liberals are totalled the figures correspond to the estimates of the Liberal leaders themselves.[1] The first year in which it made the classification was in 1888 and the totals from that year until 1892 were as follows :

| Year | Liberal Unionists | Gladstonian Liberals | Unattached Liberals |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1888 | 95 | 38 | 61 |
| 1889 | 95 | 37 | 54 |
| 1890 | 93 | 37 | 47 |
| 1891 | 95 | 38 | 43 |
| 1892 | 91 | 41 | 36 |

[1] e.g. Rosebery to Gladstone, 12 April 1891, Add. Mss. 44288, f. 135; or Rendel's account of a conversation with Gladstone, 19 Jan. 1892, Lord Rendel, Personal papers, conversations with Mr. Gladstone, 1888-98, p. 64.

took an active part in party politics had at once to commit themselves. The remainder could sit on the fence for as long as they wished. Even as late as 1892 one discovers that while ninety-one peers were definitely Liberal Unionists and forty-one Gladstonians, thirty-six were still unattached to either group.[1] Not until the division on the second home rule bill in September 1893 were the unionist Liberals and the Gladstonians finally sorted out. On that occasion the Gladstonians could muster only forty-one men. If one can judge from the consistency with which the number of peers definitely Gladstonians remained at about forty between 1888 and 1892,[2] the Government of Ireland Bill, had it reached the Lords, would have been rejected by a majority similar to that of 1893.

The peers were immune from the electioneering considerations which were so important in the Commons. Nevertheless, they too had pressure to resist. Peers who had owed their creation to Gladstone naturally were most reluctant to go against him. On the other hand, social proscription was a powerful force on the side of unionism - more so in the Lords than in the Commons. A number of Liberal peers owned Irish estates and others had close family links with Irish landowners. In addition, those with neither Irish land nor Irish relations were in their social

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1 See TABLE II, supra p. 198.

2 Ibid.

activities continually mixing with Irish unionists and could scarcely escape being influenced by the Irish unionists' views and experiences.

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# CHAPTER V.

## THE LIBERALS IN THE COUNTRY DIVIDE

Home rule was the central theme of the election - a striking contrast to that of the previous year. The arguments which had been urged in the House of Commons and the press during the preceding weeks were taken up with renewed fervour on the local platforms. The advantage lay with the unionists for, apart from the principle of home rule, they had in the Government's two Irish bills an abundance of material for damaging attacks upon the Gladstonians. In speech after speech they argued, and with effect, that Gladstonian home rule based the maintenance of the Union on nothing but faith, the supremacy of Parliament on nothing but theory, and left law and order, at best, in the hands of the men who had controlled the Land League and now controlled the National League, and whom Gladstone himself had described as seeking to march through rapine and plunder to disintegration. The land purchase bill, they declared, would place vast sums of the hard earned money of the people of Great Britain in the pockets of Irish landlords with the good will of the National League as the only security. The Gladstonians objected that they were not committed to all the specific provisions of the bills, but as this was practically an admission that some of the

provisions had been ill advised it was in itself damaging to their cause. Apart from Morley and a few others the land purchase bill was without an advocate.[1] Gladstone's statements on the question of how far he stood by his bills were of a Delphic ambiguity.[2]

On both sides there was something of the crusading spirit. The Gladstonians declared that they were fighting for justice to Ireland and the righting of former wrongs.[3] The unionists maintained that their cause was the saving of the faithful Irish unionists from the despoiling Nationalists. On the one side vivid pictures were drawn of a Britain harassed by Irish assassins and dynamitards, burdened with the expense of a huge army in Ireland, and with her parliament paralysed by the obstruction of the Irish Nationalists. On the other side equally vivid pictures were drawn of an Ireland in alliance with an enemy of Britain and filled with the troops and ships of the enemy, or of an Ireland reduced to economic ruin and sending over swarms of starving people to undermine

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1 "Everybody is dancing on the dead body of the Land Bill", Gladstone wrote to Spencer on 4 July 1886. (Miscellaneous Althorp).

2 e.g. Gladstone's speech at Edinburgh, 18 June 1886, The Times, 19 June 1886, p.8.

3 The Methodist Times wrote (15 July 1886, p.453): "Finally, let it be understood that we support Home Rule . . . because we believe that, like the Anti-Slavery Movement, the Temperance Movement, the Social Purity Movement, and the Peace Movement, it is one of the waves in the great tide of Divine progress which is slowly carrying the human race to the peaceful shore of the Millennial Age."

the wages of Great Britain's workers, or again, of an Ireland controlled by the extremists and indulging in pogroms of persecutions of landlords or Protestants.

The Gladstonians' greatest asset was Gladstone. His immense prestige, his age, his courage, and his moving appeals for justice to an unfortunate people touched the masses wherever he spoke and aroused enthusiasm such as he had never seen before.[1] He argued that home rule would strengthen and unify the Empire, would lead to a reduction of expenditure by the British Treasury, the development of Irish resources and the healing of Irish feuds - but these were subsidiary arguments mentioned in passing : his main theme was justice to Ireland and a union of mutual affection. He hotly denied that he wished to separate her from Great Britain and maintained that on the contrary his purpose was to draw the two countries into a genuine and durable union.

The Radical programme of the previous election became, if not the authorised, at least the accepted programme of the majority of Gladstonian candidates. Many of the men brought in to make good the Liberal Unionist exodus were staunch Radicals. The losses to the unionists in the middle and upper classes meant that the Gladstonians had to rely all the more on the comparatively radical working, and lower middle classes. Also, the positions left vacant by the resignations

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[1] Gladstone to the Queen, 2 July 1886, q.w.o., P. Guedella, The Queen and Mr. Gladstone, II. 415-16. (The writer of this thesis has not consulted the MS of this letter as the British Museum gives access to the Gladstone - Queen Victoria correspondence only with the consent of the Gladstone trustees).

of Liberal Unionists from the National Liberal Federation and the local associations had very often been filled by Radicals with the result that the powerful influence which these bodies exercised on candidates was more strongly radical than ever before.

This development of the election makes one wonder how much truth is in the assumption that Gladstone by taking up home rule and splitting the party diverted British politics away from domestic reform. In the long run it may have, and this is doubtful, but certainly the immediate result was that the greater portion of his party was more or less radicalised.

Another consequence of Gladstone's adoption of home rule was an important step forward in the dissolution of the alliance between the Liberal party and the Free Churchmen. The alliance had never been anything like a complete one, and had varied in strength from one denomination to another. The Methodists, among whom Conservatives had predominated twenty years earlier,[1] contained a Conservative minority reckoned by the Methodist Times at about one third.[2] The other English and Scottish nonconformist denominations, too, had Conservative minorities,[3]

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1 M. Edwards, Methodism and England, 168.

2 Methodist Times, 29 July 1886, p.498.

3 During the previous election one Baptist minister wrote to the Nonconformist and Independent regretting that "in our Dissenting churches, which are supposed to be a standing witness to the great principles of Nonconformity and religious freedom, there should be so many who hold Conservative opinions in politics." (Nonconformist and Independent, 19 Nov. 1885, p.1107).

although apparently smaller ones than the Methodists. Home rule altered this situation appreciably. Among the more influential Free Churchmen who became unionists were Rev. Charles Haddon Spurgeon (Baptist), the best known British preacher of the day; Dr. Alexander McLaren (Baptist), only a little less well known; Dr. R.W.Dale (Congregationalist), the influential Birmingham Radical; Rev. Edward White, chairman of the Congregational Union in 1886; Rev. William Arthur, ex-president of the WesleyanConference and until 1885 Liberal member for Lambeth; Dr. D. Frazer (Congregationalist); Dr. Henry Allon (Congregationalist); Rev. W. McCullogh (Methodist); and Rev. Arthur Mursell (Baptist). Another indication of the schism caused by Gladstone's Irish policy is provided by the Free Church journals which became unionist - a subject which will be referred to below[1].

Within the denominations heated controversies broke out on whether ministers should take part in politics[2], on whether a church which allowed Gladstonians to hold a meeting in its hall was morally bound to concede the same facilities to Conservatives or Liberal Unionists, and even on whether a church should allow any form of political meeting upon its

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1 See below pp. 223-5.

2 e.g. "The Wesleyandispute", Spectator, 24 July 1886

property.[1] The historian of Congregationalism records that prior to home rule when the denomination was almost entirely Liberal it had been easy to introduce political resolutions at the annual Congregational Union, but that afterwards the situation was quite different.[2] This seems to have been true of the other Free Church denominations. None of them attempted a resolution on home rule at any of the annual denominational conferences. Even in the resolutions condemning coercion as a policy, which were passed at such conferences during the next few years,[3] home rule was never referred to directly.

On the day prior to the division on the Government of Ireland Bill Chamberlain had suggested the issue of a joint election address by Hartington, Bright, and him.[4] But Hartington favoured separate addresses. He explained to Bright that he could not adopt all Chamberlain's proposals, or at least until he should know more about the Canadian constitution, and that anyway he doubted if they should commit themselves definitely

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1 e.g. The Methodist Conference in London in August 1886 passed a resolution condemning the introduction of party politics into Methodist buildings or meetings. (Methodist Times, 12 Aug. 1886).

2 A.Peel, These hundred years, 300.

3 One such resolution at the Congregational Union of 1888 caused Dr. Dale of Birmingham to withdraw from the Congregational Union. (A.W.W.Dale, Life of R.W.Dale of Birmingham, 584-8).

4 Chamberlain to Hartington, 7 June 1886, Chats. 340.1998.

to an alternative policy.[1] Chamberlain next suggested to Bright, who was member for Central Birmingham, that the two of them should issue a joint address to the electors of Birmingham.[2] Bright thought the suggestion inadvisable and so on 12 June Chamberlain issued an address in his own name.

Much of Chamberlain's address was a condemnation of Gladstone's Irish policy, and of his having kept the country ignorant of his home rule intentions during the preceding election. On the constructive side he urged local government for all parts of the British Isles, and recommended " a larger arrangement . . . under which, subject to the concurrent and supreme authority of the Imperial Parliament, the various portions of the United Kingdom shall be enabled to exercise greater influence over local administration, and over legislation for their special needs and requirements".[3]

The dilemma of home rule or coercion he boldly faced. He stated that the duty of every civilised government was to maintain the law and that the enforcement of just laws could not be properly called coercion.

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1 Hartington to Bright, 8 June 1886, Add. Mss. 43388, f.25.

2 Chamberlain to Bright, 8 June 1886, Add. Mss. 43387, f.33.

3 In his original draft Chamberlain pointed to Canada as the model for the United Kingdom (Hartington to Bright, 8 June 1886), but on the advice of Bright he struck out these references to Canada (Chamberlain to Bright, 9 June 1886, Add. Mss. 43387, f.35).

The Times welcomed the address as a weighty and closely reasoned document and recommended all unionist candidates to follow Chamberlain's example and to keep Gladstone's concealment of his home rule intention during the preceding election constantly before the electors.[1] The Daily Telegraph wrote that, while it did not undervalue Chamberlain's constructive proposals, it believed that for the present the main task was to convince the electorate that, whatever might be the right way of dealing with Ireland, Gladstone's was the wrong way. It approved Chamberlain's local government proposals and held that such a plan would divide unionists the least, and if pressed forward would dispose of Gladstone's absurd claim that his scheme still held the field. Chamberlain's plan for subordinate legislatures it dismissed as a counsel of perfection which it would be premature to entertain.[2] The Standard commented : "The sentence is for open war; and every sentiment of chivalry, every tenderness for old associations is seen to be ruthlessly set aside . . . when a leading Radical forms such an indictment as this against his chief . . . it will pierce the dullest and most prejudiced ears."[3] The Daily News objected that Chamberlain's arguments against the home rule bill were a little out of date as it had been withdrawn

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1 The Times, 12 June 1886, p.11.

2 Daily Telegraph, 12 June 1886, p.4.

3 Standard, 12 June 1886, p.5.

and was to be remodelled in part. His proposals, it pointed out, went too far for those who wished to leave things as they were, but yet were not home rule.[1] At this time the Birmingham Daily Post was far from being Chamberlain's obedient mouthpiece, but was as pro-Gladstone as its opposition to the land purchase bill and many of the provisions of the home rule bill would allow it to be. On this occasion it was one of the few papers to defend Gladstone's precipitate adoption of home rule. It stated that it agreed with Chamberlain that the Government of Ireland Bill was in many of its provisions unworkable and perhaps dangerous, but added that it could see no solution which did not concede a legislature to Ireland for the conduct of her own affairs. Chamberlain's statement that law must be upheld in Ireland it countered by maintaining that the Conservatives were pledged to coercive legislation of a kind to which no Liberal could assent. His proposal for subordinate legislatures it considered useless because, being unacceptable to Ireland, it would have to be imposed by force.[2] The Scotsman wrote that a more powerful indictment of Gladstone's policy had never yet been seen, and that Chamberlain had its full sympathy both in his indictment of Gladstone and in his indictment of what was required for Ireland.[3]

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1 Daily News, 12 June 1886, p.5.

2 Birmingham Daily Post, 12 June 1886, p.4.

3 Scotsman, 12 June 1886, p.6.

Hartington published his address five days later. He too attacked Gladstone's Irish measures and censured him for not having placed home rule before the electorate in the previous election. On the positive side he stated that the desire of the Irish people for a greater control over their own affairs was within certain limits a reasonable claim, and that the problem was to decide to what extent it could be safely conceded. He was not prepared, he continued, to commit himself on the details of any of the plans which had already been proposed, but he believed that a plan to be acceptable must have these essentials: Parliament must continue to represent the whole and not part of the United Kingdom; the powers of subordinate legislatures or administrative authorities must be delegated - not surrendered, and must be clearly defined; Parliament must have the right to control and revise the actions of the subordinate bodies; and the administration of justice must remain in the hands of an authority responsible to Parliament.

Hartington thus showed that on home rule he was neither a reactionary nor a Rip van Winkle and that in basic ideas he had come surprisingly close to those of Chamberlain. Hartington, in his first speech on the second reading, had already given an indication of this important development in his views, but the full extent of the development seems to have been imperfectly grasped at the time and is now quite forgotten.

The Times wrote that the address displayed manly earnestness and masculine good sense, and that the sentiments expressed were those of a statesman and an Englishman and were in marked contrast with Gladstone's cowardly policy of unconditional surrender and denunciation of everything that Britain had done in past struggles with intractible evils.[1] The Daily Telegraph approved Hartington's willingness to give Ireland a certain control of her own affairs. It pointed out that the return of a Salisbury government need not mean the adoption of coercion in Ireland for such a government would be dependent upon Liberal Unionist support and would have to shape its policy accordingly.[2] The Standard described the address as a plain, straightforward, and courageous statement showing how far Hartington was prepared to go in the direction of Irish self-government and frankly accepting the consequences of refusing to proceed any further.[3] The Daily News commented that no longer did they hear from Hartington that some reform of local government was enough, but that now he talked of "subordinate legislative or administrative authorities".[4] The Birmingham Daily Post ignored the address. The Scotsman wrote that it was singularly modest, temperate,

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1 The Times, 17 June 1886, p.9.

2 Daily Telegraph, 17 June 1886, p.5.

3 Standard, 17 June 1886, p.4.

4 Daily News, 17 June 1886, p.5.

and reasonable in tone and style, yet resolute, dignified, and statesmanlike, and that six months earlier a policy - with the limits which Hartington set would have been regarded as large and liberal.[1]

John Bright was unopposed in Central Birmingham, but nevertheless issued an address.[2] Three days earlier he had published a letter addressed to W.S.Caine,[3] who was re-contesting Barrow-in-Furness, and finally on 1 July he made a major speech in Birmingham.[4] On each occasion he struck hard for the unionist cause. He would not, he declared, consent to the principle of home rule. He accused Gladstone of having concealed his home rule intentions during the previous elections, and denounced him for concealing in a similar manner his land purchase bill intentions during the current election. He spoke contemptuously of the servility of Gladstone's supporters and stated that scores of them denounced his bills in private. His one positive suggestion was that the Irish M.Ps. could be formed into a grand committee and that bills for Ireland, instead of having a second reading could be discussed and settled by this grand committee and then returned to the House of Commons where, after the report stage, they would be passed with only one more reading. The suggestion made few converts. The Times commented that it would not argue whether such a committee would be

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1 Scotsman, 17 June 1886, p.6.

2 The Times, 25 June 1886.

3 Ibid., 24 June 1886.

4 Ibid., 2 July 1886.

suitable or how the Parnellites could now be induced to accept it, but that it was at least intelligible and certainly not revolutionary.[1] On 6 July Granville reported to Spencer that Bright's speech was supposed "to have played the deuce".[2] William Summers, the successful Gladstonian candidate in Huddersfield, maintained that Bright's utterances were more influential than those of all the other Liberal Unionists.[3] Kay-Shuttleworth, who was unopposed in the Clitheroe Division, Lancashire, considered that the Gladstonians would not have fared nearly so badly in the elections, but for Bright's action.[4] C. R. Spencer (Spencer's brother), who won the Mid Division, Northamptonshire, believed that it had lost him much support in that division.[5]

On 4 June the committee of Liberal Unionists, which earlier had been formed in Ulster, met and created a permanent organisation called the Ulster Liberal Unionist Committee.[6] (The name was subsequently changed to Ulster Liberal Unionist Association). This meant that the only group of any size without a central organisation was the

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1 Ibid., p.9.

2 Granville to Spencer, 6 July 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp.

3 William Summers, The Liberal Unionists and their leaders, 4.

4 Sir Ughtred Kay-Shuttleworth to Spencer, 12 July 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp.

5 C.R.Spencer to Spencer, 4 July 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp.

6 Northern Whig, 5 June 1886.

Radical Unionists. To remedy the lack Chamberlain had determined upon a Radical Unionist organisation of his own with headquarters in Birmingham.

With this object he sent out a circular inviting the recipients to a meeting of Liberals "in favour of a uniform scheme of local self-government for all parts of the United Kingdom under the supreme authority of the Imperial Parliament".[1] The meeting took place in Birmingham on 17 June and was comparatively small and unimpressive. The only members of the dissolved parliament present were W.S.Caine, Jesse Collings, George Dixon, William Kenrick, and A.B.Winterbotham.[2]

An organisation, the National Radical Union, was created and Chamberlain elected president.[3] The new body was unmistakeably Chamberlainite as a perusal of the list of M.Ps. who became members will prove.[4] Not

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1 Birmingham Daily Post, 18 June, 1886, p.5.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 They were A.H.Browne (Wellington, Shropshire), W.S.Caine (Barrow-in-Furness), R. Chamberlain (W.Islington), A.C.Corbett (Tradeston, Glasgow), G.Dixon (Edgbaston, Birmingham), Viscount Ebrington (Tavistock, Devon), Sir J.J.Goldsmid (S.St.Pancras), M. Henry (Blackfriars, Glasgow), W.Kenrick (N.Birmingham), A.G.Kitching (Maldon, Essex), Viscount Lymington (S.Molton, Devon), G.Pitt-Lewis (Barnstaple, Devon), W.C.West (W.Denbigh), M. H.M.Story-Maskelyne (Cricklade, Wiltshire), H.Wiggin (Handsworth, Stafford), A.B.Winterbotham (Cirencester, Gloucestershire), J.P.Williams (S.Birmingham), and perhaps also W.Jacks (Leith), Sir J.J.Jenkins (Carmarthen, Dist.), and G.O.Trevelyan (Hawick).

counting Trevelyan, Jenkins, or Jacks (three borough members) they consisted of eight borough members and nine county members.

Liberal Unionist relations with the other parties varied greatly from one area to another, and even from one constituency to another. In Birmingham Chamberlain spurned all open assistance from Conservatives and treated them as the hated enemy with whom expediency demanded a momentary truce. At the other extreme were a few like Goschen who boldly appeared on Conservative platforms. The Liberal Unionists knew that the closer they co-operated with the Conservatives the more Conservative votes they would gain and the more radical and diehard Liberal ones they would lose, and so in each district the Liberal Unionists adopted the amount of co-operation which they thought would pay the best dividend in votes. In the four double constituencies of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Northampton, York, and Portsmouth the device was tried of running both a Conservative and a Liberal Unionist in the hope that many votes which would be refused to the one candidate would be given to the other.

The Conservative leaders and Central Office strove hard to induce their party to observe faithfully the understanding that no Liberal who had voted against the Government of Ireland Bill would be opposed by a Conservat-

ive. Behind the scenes Salisbury did his best with recalcitrant local leaders. In a letter to Goschen he stated that he was pressing as hard as he could upon M., had failed with W., was doing all that he possibly could in the S.case, but feared that T. was in a state of open rebellion.[1] In a couple of letters to Hartington he mentioned that he had arranged for the retirement of a Conservative opponent of Goldsmid, that he had prevailed with his supporters not to oppose MacLean, and that he hoped to have the opposition to Lord Wolmer withdrawn, but was hampered by being related to him.[2] So successful were these efforts that in only four constituencies of Liberal Unionists who had voted against Gladstone did contests occur between Liberal Unionists and Conservatives. In one of them (Torquay, Devon) the "Liberal Unionist" candidate, L. McIver, refused to join the local Liberal Unionist association and was so unsatisfactory in his declarations that the Liberal Unionist Lord Ebrington felt justified in taking part in the campaign against him.[3] However, 15 Liberal Unionists or 16% of the party compared with 6½% of the Gladstonians did not seek re-election. Even allowing that three of the vacated Liberal Unionist seats were contested by other Liberal Unionists, one feels that the difference in percentage between the Liberal

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1 Cecil, III. 306.

2 Salisbury to Hartington, 20, and 21 June 1886, Chats. 340. 2009, and 340. 2011.

3 Daily News, 14 July 1886, p.5.

Unionist and Gladstonian retirements must have been due at least in part to the reluctance, or refusal, of local Conservatives to support a Liberal Unionist candidate. An indication pointing to such a conclusion is that six of the seats abandoned by the Liberal Unionists were won by Conservatives and that of three other seats, which were vacated by Liberal Unionists who went elsewhere to fight contests, two were won by Conservatives.

Behind the scenes Hartington, too, was at work using his influence to prevent Liberal Unionist - Conservative contests. In the main he was successful and in only two constituencies did Liberal Unionist candidates defy all efforts to have them stand down. Nevertheless, the Liberal Unionist leaders, desirous of holding every possible Liberal vote, appear to have been reluctant to press their followers publicly to support Conservative candidates. At last on 21 June Salisbury wrote to Hartington that he feared the Liberal Unionists would content themselves with abstaining from the polls in Conservative constituencies and asked Hartington to advise them in one of his speeches to vote Conservative.[1] Hartington responded to the request and gave the desired advice in a speech at Glasgow four days later.[2]

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1 Salisbury to Hartington, 21 June 1886, Chats. 340.2011.

2 The Times, 26 June 1886, p.8.

In Birmingham Chamberlain's own influence and his attitude to the Conservatives, the great influence of John Bright, the lesser but important influence of the Congregational clergyman, Rev. R.W.Dale,[1] and the decision of the Gladstonians to contest none of the Liberal Unionist constituencies apart from Bordesley all combined to enable the Chamberlainites, not only to keep in their hands the National Liberal Federation machinery of the area, but even to retain within it the Gladstonian members. The key to this remarkable achievement was the refusal of either Chamberlain or his followers to regard the party split as more than a temporary misfortune, and their sturdy anticipation that their objections to Gladstone's home rule proposals would be conceded in the end and reunion achieved. Chamberlain began the election by declaring that he neither sought nor desired Conservative aid.[2] Later he modified his attitude to the extent of advising Liberal Unionists to vote for Conservative candidates. In a published letter he implied that the only factor which might prevent him from giving a vote, which he had in the Harborough Division of Leicestershire, to the Conservative candidate would be the difficulty of travelling to

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1 E.E.Kellett, a resident of Birmingham, considered that Chamberlain might have failed to hold Birmingham but for the moral support of Bright and Dale. (E.E.Kellett, As I remember, 162-3).

2 Chamberlain to H. Payton, chairman of the Liberal Council of W. Birmingham, n.d., Birmingham Daily Post, 11 June 1886, p. 5.

Harborough on polling day.[1] In this Chamberlain went further than many of his Birmingham supporters were willing to go. In the East Division, where the Gladstonian W.T.G.Cook opposed the Conservative Henry Matthews, Rev. R.W.Dale[2] and other Chamberlainites spoke on Cook's behalf. The Birmingham Daily Post supported both the candidature of Cook and of the Liberal Unionist Jesse Collings, who was standing for Bordesley, the only other Birmingham constituency to be contested.

The Irish Liberal Unionists stood five candidates in Ulster and three in the rest of Ireland. All were in constituencies where they had hopes of gaining the votes of Roman Catholic unionists who would not vote Conservative because of the Conservative alliance with Orangeism, and secondly, of a number who might abstain rather than vote for what they considered to be the landlords' party. The Irish Liberal Unionists claimed that the Irish Conservatives took unfair advantage of their abnormal victories in the previous year and that the size of the Liberal Unionist following in the country entitled them to more than eight candidates.[3]

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1 Chamberlain to T.K.Tapling, the Conservative candidate, Harborough Div., Leicestershire, 24 June, 1886, Birmingham Daily Post, 29 June 1886.

2 A.W.W.Dale, Life of R.W.Dale of Birmingham, 463.

3 Northern Whig, June and July 1886, passim.

The Liberal Unionists had an advantage over the Gladstonians in having much more adequate funds for the election.[1] On 11 May The Times stated that the Duke of Bedford had sent the Liberal Unionist Committee a blank cheque;[2] after the formation of the National Liberal Union on 22 May it was reported that contributions had poured in freely and that several were of £1,000;[3] and on 9 June the Central News reported that, although the Liberal Unionists had as yet made no direct appeal, nearly £30,000 had been subscribed to their funds.[4] The accuracy of these statements cannot be checked, but one may assume that by the end of the election a sum had been subscribed much larger than £30,000, and perhaps even as large as the £131,395 which was subscribed for a special Liberal Unionist election fund in 1892.[5] Probably one reflection of the state of the respective party central funds was that, at least in certain areas (e.g. Manchester[6]), the Conservatives and Liberal Unionists had a greater abundance of posters and electioneering literature than had their opponents.

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1 This fact was publicly known at the time. For instance on 10 June the Birmingham Daily Post (p.4) wrote ". . . Lord Hartington's Liberal Unionist Committee . . . is now in the sacred cause of liberty breathing out threatenings against members who have dared to think for themselves by supporting the leader of the Liberal party; and which emphasizes its threats by daily shaking its money bags in the face of the public"

2 The Times, 11 May 1886, p.13.

3 Daily Telegraph, 24 May 1886, p.3.

4 Birmingham Daily Post, 9 June 1886, p.5.

5 Wolmer (Liberal Unionist chief whip) to Duke of Devonshire, 5 Sept. 1892, Chats. 340.2503, and 340.2503 A.

6 Manchester Guardian, 3 July 1886, p.7.

Another Liberal Unionist advantage was that they had no great difficulty in finding good or satisfactory candidates, not only for the constituencies which they hoped to win, but also for a number of seats, such as Dundee[1], where defeat was certain but in which they had a substantial following. (This device of fighting a contest for the sole purpose of encouraging and consolidating the party's supporters in the district appears to have been well established in 1886, but, was less common than today). The Gladstonians on the other hand were able only partially to make good the loss in personnel caused by the Liberal Unionist secession.[2] On 1 July, the day before the first pollings took place, Arnold Morley wrote to Gladstone that the greatest difficulty had been the provision of good candidates, but that most of the seats worth fighting were occupied.[3] Two days later Lord Monson, the Gladstonian whip in the Lords, wrote to Spencer that notable features of the election were, the great diminution in subscriptions, the greatly inferior class of candidates to volunteer their services, and the number of candidates wanting money aid.[4] One indication of the Gladstonian shortage of

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1 W.G.Irving, "Dundee and District Liberal Unionist Association", The Liberal Unionist, 1 April 1889, p. 144.

2 The public were aware of the Gladstonian difficulty in finding candidates. e.g. The Daily Telegraph (p.5) wrote on 16 June, "It is an open secret that whereas both Conservative and Unionist Central Committees have a glut of good candidates volunteering their services even to the extent of leading 'forlorn hopes' the Government party . . . are not so fully served in that respect".

3 A.Morley to Gladstone, 1 July 1886, Add.Mss.44253, f. 15.

4 Lord Monson to Spencer, 3 July 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp.

suitable candidates was that they allowed 110 unionists (86 Conservatives and 24 Liberal Unionists) to be returned without a contest. In the previous election the number of unopposed Conservatives had been 10. The corresponding figures for the Liberals were 42 unopposed in this election and 13 in the previous one. The increase of 29 is explained, not by a scarcity of unionist candidates, but by the 1885 election having been fought on the new franchise, and with both sides unwilling to consider any seat hopeless until they should have tested it by a contest. A candidate's local connections had then an importance greater than now, and a further indication of the Gladstonians' candidate difficulty was the number of candidates who were complete strangers to their constituencies.[1] The candidate difficulty in conjunction with his determination to win if humanly possible led Gladstone to adopt the innovation of sending letters and telegrams from himself to candidates - an innovation which aroused much adverse comment among

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[1] e.g. The Glasgow Herald, 2 July 1886, (p.6) wrote, "The Separatists have at the eleventh hour succeeded in finding a candidate [for Greenock], but we do not know that they are to be congratulated very much. Who and what is Mr. Harold Wright it would be rash to say, for nobody except the Government whips seem to know. That he is the son of a father of an English local reputation is about all that can be said for his personality, and that he is a blind follower of Mr. Gladstone is all that can be said of his politics. In these circumstances Mr. Sunderland [Liberal Unionist] should have a comparatively easy task". (The Greenock result was, Sunderland : 2905; and Wright : 2208).

unionists and in the unionist press.[1] The unionists in their turn did not hesitate to break with convention for a number of their peers took the unprecedented step of continuing to speak on the platforms after the issue of the writs. Gladstone was eager that his peers should do the same[2] and Granville circulated a memorandum on the subject to at least Kimberley and Harcourt. Both men opposed the suggestion[3] and it seems to have been dropped.

The Liberal Unionists were exceptionally fortunate in their newspaper support. Among the Liberal publications which Gladstone's home rule had made unionist were

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1 e.g. Kate Courtney noted in her diary (16 July 1886), "One of the rather painful and at the same time ridiculous features of the Election has been Gladstone's letters and telegrams recommending candidates which went flying all over the country and were full of misrepresentations and demagogism which one usually expects from an election agent". Courtney, XXII.

2 Memorandum by Granville, [1 July 1886], Add. Mss. 44179, f.142.

3 Comments by Kimberley and Harcourt, 2 July 1886, pencilled on Granville's memorandum of the previous day.

Daily Telegraph (Circulation c. 220,000[1]), Scotsman (circulation c. 70,000[2]), Glasgow Herald (circulation c. 70,000[3]), Spectator, Economist, Observer, Daily Chronicle, Manchester Examiner, York Herald, and Northern Whig, as well as many others of lesser importance. In addition The Times[4] was very sympathetic to the Liberal Unionists and often could have been mistaken for a Liberal Unionist paper. The Birmingham Daily Post at this time can best be described as Gladstonian in sympathy, but opposed to many of the provisions of Gladstone's bills.[5]

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1 H.A.B., About newspapers; chiefly English and Scottish, 19.

2 Ibid., 56.

3 Ibid., 66.

4 The circulation of The Times decreased steadily from 1868 (History of "The Times", III 115) until in 1908 it was 38,000 (ibid., III. 768). In 1878 it was upwards of 60,000 (ibid., III. 118).

5 The Birmingham Daily Post took satisfaction in the return of Gladstonian candidates and favoured the principle of home rule. On 13 July(p.4) it wrote: "Catholic emancipation, parliamentary reform, repeal of the corn laws, all illustrate the same process - Liberals at first divided and progress delayed: Liberals at last united and victory obtained. What has been will be . . . Such changes [in the Government of Ireland Bill] will have to be made as will ensure the supremacy [of the Imperial Parliament and guarantee to all subjects of the Crown protection to their liberty and property".

Not until some time later can one term it unionist with confidence. In this it was typical of very many of Chamberlain's Midland supporters. The religious press had a political influence during the last quarter of the nineteenth century such as it had never had before and does not now have. Among the more important religious journals which became unionist were, Christian World, which in 1886 had a much larger circulation than any other religious journal,[1] the Radical Baptist, the Unitarian Christian Life, the Anglican Moderate Liberal Guardian (circulation 15,000 - 20,000[2]) and Spurgeon's Sword and the Trowel. The Free Church British Quarterly Review became unionist also, but by 1886 its circulation had fallen to 500 copies[3] and it ceased publication during the year. The Methodist Recorder, too, became unionist, but it was one of the few Free Church journals which had always been a little Conservative in its outlook.

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1 T.H.Darlow, William Robertson Nicoll: life and letters, 58. (Darlow mentions that the circulation of the Christian World at one time reached 120,000).

2 H.A.B., About newspapers; chiefly English and Scottish, 131.

3 Ibid., 64.

In common with the Conservatives, the Liberal Unionists received valuable assistance from Irish speakers provided by organisations such as the Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union, the Ulster Anti-Repeal Union, and to a certain extent the Ulster Liberal Unionist Committee. These speakers were chosen from all ranks of society and were exceptionally useful propagandists as they spoke with the authority of "men on the spot" and with earnestness arising from the knowledge that the triumph of home rule in Great Britain would mean civil war in Ireland. Liberal Unionists were themselves in high demand for Conservative platforms and so many requests for Liberal Unionist speakers were received that Lord Camperdown, who was in close touch with the party headquarters in Spring Gardens, remarked in a letter to Goschen that one would think the Conservatives had been afflicted with dumbness.[1]

Two outstanding features of Liberal Unionist contests were the improvised nature of the Liberal Unionist party machinery and the rowdiness of their meetings. The first task of the great majority of Liberal Unionist candidates was hastily to gather together a local party organisation sufficient for the purposes of the election. Conditions varied much from constituency to constituency. In some a fair number of unionists were at hand who had resigned from the local Liberal association, but in others election committees and supporting workers had to be found

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1 Elliot, II. 84.

almost entirely among men with no electioneering experience. In many areas the one section of the population in which the Liberal Unionists had least converts was the Liberal roughs. These, ably assisted by Irish in the areas with Irish colonies, broke up numerous Liberal Unionist meetings and disorganised many others. On several occasions platforms were stormed and their occupants manhandled. To add to candidates' difficulties "by ticket only" meetings of any size were usually impracticable as no one knew who the Liberal Unionists of the area were. The result was that some candidates even gave up the attempt to hold meetings of any sort and relied almost entirely on their election addresses and on canvassing. Such was the course taken by Chamberlain's brother, Richard[1], who was returned by West Islington with a majority of nearly two to one. At his first and only meeting of the contest he had for forty-five minutes vainly striven to obtain a hearing and then had had to escape through a back door when his platform was stormed[2].

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1 R. Chamberlain, "Liberal Unionist organisation," The Liberal Unionist, 1 Feb. 1888. (One man was imprisoned for a month with hard labour for his part in breaking up R. Chamberlain's meeting. The Times, 28 June 1886, p.6)

2 Ibid

On 28 June The Times wrote that the election meetings in London had been the scenes of violence and disorder on a scale hitherto unknown, and that a unionist meeting in the south or east of the city was taken at once as a signal for a riot. On 9 July it stated that the election had been marked in many parts of the kingdom by unusual turbulence, and that in London, where the political atmosphere had hitherto been cooler than most places, there had been a discreditable amount of it. It trusted that this turbulence was a transient and exceptional phenomenon for no one, no matter how they might admire the past, could wish to revert to the broken heads and drunken orgies of elections in the good old times. The Daily Telegraph wrote that many of the characteristics and incidents of the election had been honourable all round, but that like other elections it had bred much bad blood between many English gentlemen and had stimulated coarse appeals to the lower passions of the populace. It stated that hundreds of Conservative and Liberal Unionist candidates had seen their meetings broken up and that instead of fair and open discussion of the great issues involved heated partisans on both sides had howled down opposition.[1] Next day the Daily News expressed quite a different view. It maintained that on the whole the elections had been

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[1] Daily Telegraph, 14 July 1886, p. 4.

conducted both in England and Ireland with remarkably little violence, and that, considering how very important had been the issues and how deeply each side had been aroused, the country had been wonderfully and creditably quiet. London, it admitted, had had more disorder than any other part of England, but claimed that even there the disorder had rarely gone beyond a very rough kind of horse play.[1] Although the Daily News looked at the matter through Gladstonian spectacles its opinion contained a truth for in very many countries an election on such an issue could not have been completed without bloodshed. In Great Britain there had at least been none of that.[2]

Even in Ireland the election passed with surprisingly little incident. The most important was an attack, in which several people were injured by bullets, on the Conservative Club in Dublin[3]. The savage riots which had broken out in Belfast on 1 June, and which recurred spasmodically during the following weeks, were independent of the general election, and the same was true of a riot which arose out of a 12 July Orange Order procession in Co. Tyrone.[4]

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1 Daily News, 15 July 1886, p.4.

2 The Conservative candidate for S.Islington died a few days after a meeting at which he and his platform party (which included the Duke of Norfolk) had been manhandled by roughs, but the claim that he died as a direct result of the occurrence was unfounded.

3 Irish Times, 7 July, 1886, p.5.

4 Northern Whig, 14 July 1886, p.8.

316 Conservatives, 191 Gladstonian Liberals, 77 Liberal Unionists,[1] and 85 Parnellites were returned. 47 Liberal Unionists were returned for county divisions, 29 for borough divisions (including 2 in London), and 1 for the University of London. Their county returns consisted of 34 in England, 9 in Scotland, 2 in Wales, and 2 in Ireland; and their borough ones of 21 in England, 8 in Scotland, and none in Wales, or Ireland. Altogether the Liberal Unionists fought 139 contests and had 28 men (including 2 from Scotland and 1 from Wales) returned unopposed. Of the 93 who had voted against the second reading, 75 stood again for the same constituencies, 15 retired, and 3 unsuccessfully contested constituencies other than in 1885. Of the 75 who re-stood for the same constituencies, 23 were returned unopposed, 37 after contests, 1 (Sir H. Hussey Vivian) as an independent Gladstonian, and 14 were defeated. 12 Liberal Unionists who had not been in the previous parliament were returned,[2] all of them after contests. 7 captured their seats from Gladstonians, 2 from Parnellites, and 3 were for constituencies from which the sitting Liberal Unionists had retired. Of the 11 Liberals who had abstained from, or been unable to vote on 8 June, 4 (including the Speaker, A.W.Peel) were returned unopposed as Liberal

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1 Including Sir E.W.Watkin who was not included in the 93 who voted against the Government on 8 June.

2 Including Jesse Collings who was unseated on petition in April 1886.

Unionists; 2 as Gladstonians, but with contests; and 5 did not stand again. The Liberal Unionist victories were, England : 33; Scotland : 13; Wales : 1; and Ulster : 2. Their unopposed returns, England : 25; Scotland : 2; and Wales : 1. Their defeats, England : 48; Scotland : 30; Wales : 6; Ulster : 3; and the rest of Ireland : 3. The higher proportion of representatives of county constituencies, which, as has been noted in the previous chapter,[1] was an aspect of the pre-election Liberal Unionists, was more marked than before in the new parliament. The percentages of county representatives in the three parties now were : Liberal Unionists, 61%; Gladstonian Liberals, 53%; and Conservatives, 40%.

The Chamberlainites did remarkably well in the election. Eighteen members of the National Radical Union were returned, including Jesse Collings, who had been unseated on petition in the previous April, and D.H. Coghill and W. Morrison, neither of whom had been in the previous parliament. Nine of the Chamberlainites were for county constituencies and ten for boroughs. In Birmingham the Gladstonians allowed five of the seven seats to go uncontested to Liberal Unionists, and in the remaining two they were defeated by Jesse Collings and the Conservative, H. Matthews. Chamberlain's influence

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1 See above p. 178.

in the surrounding districts told heavily against the Gladstonians even where no Liberal Unionist was standing. A week after the commencement of polling Gladstone's chief whip admitted to him that Chamberlain's influence in this region was greater than he had anticipated. He added that it had resulted in one Gladstonian candidate changing into a Liberal Unionist at the last moment in order to avoid a contest.[1] It also told in areas other than the Midlands. The Gladstonian candidate Lewis Morris considered that Chamberlain's influence had been the main cause of his defeat in the Welsh borough of Pembroke and Haverford West.[2]

The Ulster Liberal Unionists returned two members, T.W.Russell (S. Tyrone) and T. Lea (S. Londonderry). Both were for county divisions and both captured their seats from Nationalists. In spite of being only two in number, Russell and Lea were to have an influence when Irish matters came before the new parliament, not often accorded to ordinary members for they were accepted as the spokesmen of the Irish unionist tenant farmers - a group which by its existence alone was of incalculable value to the unionist cause,

An area in which the Liberal Unionists did well was the

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1 A. Morley to Gladstone, 7 July 1886, Add. Mss. 44253, f. 19.

2 Lewis Morris to Spencer, 20 July 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp.

strongly Free Church[1] Devon and Cornwall. There seven of the eight sitting Liberal Unionists successfully defended their seats against Gladstonian candidates, and the eighth, the not very sound Liberal Unionist, L. McIver (Torquay Div.), lost his seat, not to a Gladstonian, but to a Conservative. In Wales and the north of England the Gladstonians held their own, and in Scotland, although they lost seventeen seats to the Liberal Unionists, they had only two losses to the Conservatives. However, the returns for southern and midland England turned what would have been a defeat into a rout. In the latter regions the Gladstonians lost thirty-five county and twenty-eight borough seats. Half of the borough losses were in London. The counties of Middlesex, Surrey, Kent, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Huntingtonshire, Rutland, Worcester, Shropshire, and Hereford returned none but unionists. In London eleven Gladstonians were returned and fifty unionists - a result which, Arnold Morley admitted, was worse than his lowest forecast.[2]

A little over two and a half million electors voted compared with almost four million in the previous general

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1 Frank Tillyard, "The distribution of the Free Churches in England", Sociological Review (Jan. 1935), XXVII, 13.

2 A.Morley to Gladstone, 7 July 1886, Add. Mss. 44253, f.19.

election. This decline in the total poll was due partly to abstentions and partly to the 152 unopposed returns. On making allowance for the unopposed returns one finds that upwards of 800,000 electors must have abstained. Abundant contemporary testimony states that the majority, although by no means all, of these abstentions were by Liberals and an examination of the returns supports this. Gladstone interpreted them to mean that very many people had not yet made up their minds about home rule.[1] Undoubtedly this was true of many, but at least some were decided on the question of a separate Irish Legislature - and were opposed to it - yet through sentiment for old associations, or loyalty to Gladstone,[2] or ingrained hostility to the Conservative party could not bring themselves to vote against a Liberal. In a similar way not every Conservative could break down his repugnance to voting for a Liberal - even though a unionist Liberal. This must have been especially true of a number of the less discerning Conservative electors who tended to equate the whole of Liberalism with Radicalism. One

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1 W.E.Gladstone, The Irish question : history of an idea; lessons of the election, 27.

2 The Gladstonian election agent in the Mid Division, Northamptonshire considered that the fall in the Liberal vote was in large measure due to a counterpoise between respect for, and gratitude towards Gladstone and distrust of the home rule bill.(J. Becke to Spencer, 5 July 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp).

Conservative farmer of Worcestershire has recorded that he found it most unpleasant to recognize in the Liberal Unionists "the black-coated, cotton-gloved gentry who, but yesterday, had been trying on the village greens, to prejudice the farm workers against their employers".[1] Many staunch Conservative opponents of disestablishment, or "free schools", or certain other feared proposals had similar feelings to overcome before voting for a Liberal Unionist.

On the completion of the borough elections the Daily Telegraph reckoned that the Conservatives could have gained a further twenty or thirty seats if instead of supporting the Liberal Unionists they had taken advantage of the Liberal split, and further, that only a dozen Liberal Unionists such as Chamberlain owed their seats entirely to Liberal votes, or to the unwillingness of Liberals to oppose them.[2] Any such estimate could have been at best little better than a personal opinion. All that one can say with confidence is that many Liberal Unionists would have been defeated, but for Conservative support. As was only natural, the greater the Liberal majority in 1885 the more likely was defeat for a Liberal

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1 J.A.Bridges, Reminiscences of a country politician, 167.

2 Daily Telegraph, 13 July 1886, p.5.

Unionist in 1886.

The factor which contributed most to the Gladstonian disaster was the defections and abstentions among the Liberal county voters, and especially among the farm workers of whom some 400,000, it was estimated, were enfranchised. These farm workers, whose enthusiastic response to the "three acres and a cow" cry had given victory to the Liberal party in the previous December, had felt themselves betrayed when the Government devoted its energies to home rule and not to the provision of the expected allotments. Then too, Chamberlain and Collings, whom the farm workers had come to regard as their champions, were now against Gladstone and urging them to follow their example. Even the Standard acknowledged these facts. The losses of the Government were not, it wrote on 14 July, due altogether to a wave of pure unionist sentiment, but were explained in part by a reaction after the extravagant hopes of 1885 and by the influence of Jesse Collings. Few sections of the community suffered more from cheap Irish labour than the poverty-stricken farm workers. This not only gave them a greater antipathy to the Irish than most, but may have made them more susceptible to the claim that home rule

would ruin Ireland and fill Great Britain with swarms of starving Irish willing to work at almost any wage. C.R. Spencer, the Gladstonian candidate in the agricultural Mid Division, Northamptonshire, complained that the unionists had flooded the constituency with pamphlets stating that Gladstonian policy would swamp the labour market with Irishmen.[1] Then too - unlike so many of the urban workers - the majority of farm workers were Anglicans and the disestablishment agitation either left them unmoved or inclined them towards the Conservatives. The absence of a number of farm workers from their homes because of the hay harvest appears to have had an influence also.[2]

The Gladstonians, in the main, fared worst where the farm worker vote had the most influence - in the predominantly agricultural constituencies of large farms worked by paid labour. In Yorkshire, Durham, and Northumberland, where both counties and boroughs remained solidly Gladstonian, very many of the county voters were miners or industrial workers whose political interests were similar to those of the workers in the boroughs. In Wales where Gladstone held all his county seats, and in large areas of Scotland where he did equally well, a proportion of the constituencies were likewise ones in which miners and industrial workers predominated, but in the majority the bulk of the voters were dependent

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[1] C.R.Spencer to Spencer, 10 July 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp.

[2] During the contest C.R.Spencer considered that he had most to fear from apathy and the hay harvest. (C.R.Spencer to Spencer, 4, and 10 July 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp).

on agriculture. However, in many of these agricultural constituencies the largest number of voters were not farm workers, but tenant farmers with grievances similar to those of the Irish tenant farmers and eager for the remedial legislation which they had come to associate with the Liberal party. This was especially true of the Scottish highlands and islands. Unlike England disestablishment was a burning question in the rural communities of both Scotland and Wales, and as elsewhere disestablishers could look only to the Gladstonians for the achievement of their object. The loss of so many of the Liberal landed families to the unionists told heavily against the Gladstonians in the country, for as yet the ballot act had no more than curtailed the landed families' local political influence.[1] Afterwards the Congregational Review noted that in districts where members of the great Whig families had been regarded as natural chiefs of the party the Gladstonians had suffered humiliating defeat.[2] Sir Herbert Maxwell wrote in his memoir that his re-election for Wigtownshire was the easiest he had experienced, and explained that this was because Lord Stair had become a

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1 Possibly even direct intimidation of voters was not yet absolutely extinct. After the election of the previous year cottagers suspected of having voted Liberal were turned out of their homes on some of the large estates in the Berwick-on-Tweed Division. (G.M.Trevelyan, Grey of Falloden, 23).

2 "Is Liberal reunion possible?", Congregational Review, Oct. 1886.

Liberal Unionist and had given his great local influence to the Conservatives.[1] C.S.Roundell, in a letter to Spencer shortly after the election, mentioned that in the Skipton Division of Yorkshire (won by the Liberal Unionist, W. Morrison) the Devonshire, Ribblesdale, Sir C.Tempest, and Morrison influence had all been thrown on the unionist side and that he had been almost the only person of standing on the Gladstonian side.[2]

The urban workers and the miners had many inducements to vote Gladstonian for they believed that it was the only party which offered any real prospect of disestablishment, and of the temperance, education, taxation, labour, and other reforms which so many of them intensely desired.[3] The Chamberlainites certainly were more fully committed to these objects than was the Gladstonian party as a whole, but in very many areas they had no candidate and, in addition, were doomed, it seemed, never to assist in legislation except by rejoining the Gladstonians. As has been noted, part of the secret of Chamberlain's success in Birmingham was the belief that he and his followers would eventually rejoin a Gladstonian party purged of its more objectionable home rule errors.

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1 Sir H.Maxwell, Evening memories, 177.

2 C.S.Roundell to Spencer, 22 July 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp.

3 One is startled to find this in Hammond's Gladstone and the Irish nation, 557 : "In 1886 there were no voters who had reason to think they were consulting their own interests or the interests of their class in voting for Home Rule. Gladstone's ill devised procedure had made the election a plebiscite on Home Rule. No elector who wanted anything else had much reason for voting for him."

Observers were impressed by the amount of apathy among Liberals in this election, and especially when they remembered the enthusiasm of the Liberal voters in the previous November.[1] The party's sudden abandonment of domestic reform in order to give a separate legislature to Ireland and generous compensation to her landlords caused a mood of disillusionment, not only among the farm workers, but among all those eager for reforms. As the Rev. W. Tuckwell recorded in his reminiscences, they felt that their devotion had been thrown away and their confidence abused.[2] In the constituencies where home rule was pressed forward during the election to the exclusion of domestic reform the disillusionment would have been merely intensified. The historian of the miners' unions of Northumberland and Durham records that when radical miners' agents began to advocate home rule with all the vigour which they had previously expanded on the union cause there

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[1] In one north of England constituency in November, 1885 one man sacrificed a day's pay in order to walk to the poll and back, a distance of 24 miles, and another, although the day was a holiday, rose at five o'clock in the morning in order to be the first person to vote in the constituency which was one just created by the Redistribution Bill. In the same constituency many voters bought new pencils which they used to mark the ballot paper and then laid past as family heirlooms. (An account of canvassing experiences, Christian Life, 19 Dec. 1885, p. 612).

[2] Rev. W.Tuckwell, Reminiscences of a radical parson, 60.

were protests, for not every miner could convince himself that home rule was a labour question and the Land League a kind of trade society.[1] Patriotism was not a preserve of any one section of the community. During the July general election a speaker addressing a very large radical audience in a staunchly Gladstonian area asked, "Why should anyone object to home rule?" and was answered by a number of voices, "Because it will lead to the break up of the Empire". The speaker in the heat of the moment retorted, "Who cares whether it will or not?" and from that moment his hold on the meeting was lost. The pro-Gladstonian Inquirer, which recorded the incident, commented that the British people did care, and cared very much for the integrity of the Empire.[2]

The Irish vote from which the Gladstonians had expected much proved a broken reed. Part of the explanation seems to have been an overestimate of the part which the Irish vote had played in the previous general election. On that occasion the Irish voters had not obeyed the order to vote Conservative to the extent with which they were generally credited. The Irish National League of Great Britain (the Nationalist party machine in Great Britain), it would seem, reckoned that 40,000

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1 E. Welbourne, The miners' unions of Northumberland and Durham, 199 - 200.

2 Inquirer, 24 July 1886, p.484 - 5.

Irish voted in the Greater London area out of a possible 57,000, but that only some 28,000 of them obeyed the order to vote Conservative.[1] The proportion of Irish Nationalists who voted Conservative varied very much from constituency to constituency. Sir Wilfred Lawson assumed that all the Irish voted against him in the Cockermouth Division of Cumberland in 1885,[2] but L. A. Atherley Jones believed that he was given at least a moiety of the Irish votes in the N.W.Durham Division.[3] Then too, the size of the Irish vote may have been overestimated in a number of areas. A high proportion of the unmarried Irish lived in lodgings of insufficient value to qualify for the vote, and others were disqualified through not having paid the poor rate, or for having been in receipt of parish relief.[4] John Denvir in The Irish in Britain reckoned that about one in ten of the Irish in Great Britain were voters.[5] Another factor, and one which may have been as important as any in explaining the inability of the Irish to bring assistance to the Gladstonians to the extent which had been anticipated, may

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1 "The Irish Vote," The Times, 3 Dec. 1885, p.7. The article is based on information which could have come only from a source within the Irish party machine.

2 G.W.E.Russell, Sir Wilfred Lawson : a memoir, 187.

3 L.A.Atherley Jones, Looking back, 27.

4 John Denvir, The Irish in Britain, 326.

5 Ibid.

have been that the Irish by their willingness to underbid the local workmen on the labour market and their past record of strike breaking,[1] as well as their general improvidence and low standards of living caused so much anti-Irish feeling in the areas where they settled that no great stimulus was needed to carry many people into the unionist camps. In the previous year many Conservatives had reacted to Parnell's patronage of the Conservative party by fearing that it would lose them more support in the constituencies than it could bring them.[2] After the 1885 general election a correspondent of The Times mentioned that the early promise of the Irish vote to Wilfred Blunt in North Camberwell was said to have been a factor

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[1] Welbourne, discussing the Northumberland and Durham miners' reaction to home rule, wrote : "The influx of Irish black-legs, ignorant, violent, improvident, drunken, priest-attended, had not yet been forgotten. Nor was it forgotten that stout north-country pitmen had been driven to America by the wage competition of these strangers . . . " (The miners' unions of Northumberland and Durham, 200).

[2] Harrowby wrote to Carnarvon on 22 July 1885, "Already there is a growing distaste in the country for our supposed Irish alliance and distrust has been excited by Randolph's and Gorst's unfortunate speeches on the Maamtrasna affair . . . The vote in question [on a grant desired by the Irish Roman Catholic bishops for University College, Dublin] would be considered as showing that the compact was signed, sealed and delivered, and in addition to the horror of Ireland and of Irish alliances we should awaken the whole Protestant feeling which is only slumbering . . ." (P.R.O. 30.6.55, letter 8).

which had contributed to his defeat.[1] The areas in which the Irish were most concentrated were London, Liverpool, Glasgow, Manchester, Salford, Dundee, Greenock, the Lancashire cotton towns, and the Scottish coal mining and industrial areas.[2] In practically every one of these the Gladstonians were worsted, or were much less successful than could have been anticipated.

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1 "The Irish vote," The Times, 3 Dec. 1885, p.7.

2 The census of 1891 (Census of England and Wales, 1891, vol. III and Census of Scotland, 1891, vol II, part I) gives the following figures for these areas : London, 66,465 Irish born or 1.58% of the population; Liverpool, 47,243 or 9.12%; Glasgow, 59,822 or 10.57%; Manchester, 23,005 or 4.56%; Salford, 9,265 or 4.68%; Dundee, 7,918 or 5.16%; Greenock, 7,860 or 12.39%; Lancashire (including Manchester and Salford), 164,489 or 4.19%; Lanarkshire (including Glasgow), 107,863 or 9.75%; Renfrewshire (including Greenock), 24,668 or 10.69%; Ayrshire, 11,074 or 4.89%; Dumbartonshire, 9,845 or 10.04%; Stirlingshire, 4,001 or 3.39%, and West Lothian, 3,646 or 6.90%. The Irish communities contained a large number of "Irishmen" born in Great Britain, and there were almost certainly more Irish born persons in 1886 than in 1891. The 1891 census recorded 104,059 or 18.5% fewer Irish born persons than the 1881 census.

# CHAPTER VI

## THE LIBERAL UNIONISTS CONTINUE TO SIT WITH THE GLADSTONIANS

Once men saw how the tide of the election was running their thoughts began to centre on the question of the government which would succeed Gladstone's. On 12 July Derby wrote to Hartington that The Times, the court, and the plutocracy wanted a coalition, and gave five reasons why he thought a coalition would be a dismal mistake.[1] On the following day Hartington wrote to Chamberlain that he expected that Salisbury would not take office without making desperate efforts to form a coalition.[2] Chamberlain, who was holidaying in Italy, replied :

> . . . of course I could not join any Coalition; it would be absurd in me, and I need not argue it.
>
> With you it is somewhat different. You might join and be perfectly consistent.
>
> But if you do you must make up your mind to cease to be or call yourself a Liberal.
>
> The force of circumstances will be irresistible, and you will be absorbed in the great Constitutional party.. . .
>
> I do not suppose that you desire this, and I have therefore always assumed that you would refuse to head or to join a Coalition Government. In that case we must all give a loyal support to the Conservatives provided that they do not play the fool

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1 Derby to Hartington, 12 July 1886, Chats. 340.2019.

2 Hartington to Chamberlain, 13 July 1886, q.w.o., Garvin, II. 263.

> either in foreign policy or in reactionary measures at home. They might count on some years of power - after which, if Mr. Gladstone is out of the way, the Liberal party will probably pick itself together again, and I hope may be strong enough to turn them out.
>
> . . . I think we might suggest a policy which would last a year or two, and that is as much as can be expected at this time.[1]

The Times pressed for a coalition government under the premiership of Hartington. The Spectator plied the same advice, and suggested that Salisbury should be Foreign Secretary and leader in the Lords. The Standard set out reasons why Hartington should join a Salisbury administration, but was resolutely opposed to a Hartington premiership. On 13 July the Daily Telegraph wrote that Conservatives and Liberal Unionists should coalesce into a "National Party", but three days later admitted that the difficulties in the way of a coalition government were insuperable. The Scotsman, Glasgow Herald, Irish Times, and Northern Whig all advised or suggested a coalition. The Daily News assumed that there would be no coalition, but that the Liberal Unionists would give a Conservative government their benevolent support until it should attempt reactionary legislation, or until Liberals should have adjusted the differences which divided them.

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[1] Chamberlain to Hartington, 16 July 1886, Chats. 340.2021 (Holland II. 168-9).

The Birmingham Daily Post did not expect a coalition either, and prophesied that a very few months would show that united action between Conservatives and Liberal Unionists was as impracticable as it was indefensible in principle.

Hartington did not have Chamberlain's optimism about a future Liberal reunion. His attitude at this time is indicated in a letter to Goschen on 22 July. He wrote that he expected Salisbury to ask Goschen to take office, and suggested that he should not hastily reject the offer as his presence in the government would strengthen it, and perhaps also provide a better means of communication between the two unionist parties.

> . . . Chamberlain and I, he continued, could probably keep the Liberal Unionists together for a time at least. The most serious objection is that it would probably be a final separation between you and the Liberal Party; that is from the Liberal Party as now constituted. But is it likely that you will ever be able to return to it, or remain in it ? I don't feel very confident that I shall be able to do it myself; if I do, it will be because I have a greater capacity for swallowing unpleasant morsels than you have. If as some people think, a total reconstruction of parties must come, you will only have preceded me a little. [1]

The Gladstone administration resigned on 20 July. Two days later the Queen wrote to Salisbury, who was at Royât, asking him to form a government "and as strong a

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[1] Hartington to Goschen, 22 July 1886, Elliot, II. 95-96.

one as he possibly can form." She was as eager as ever for a coalition.

> . . . It seems to her, she wrote, to be a time when every nerve should be strained, every personal and party feeling should be set aside for the public good, and it would be a great thing and what the country earnestly wishes for and expects, if he could secure the assistance of some of the Liberal Unionists.[1]

Salisbury arrived in London on the 23rd. Next morning, before going to Osborne, he called with Hartington and tried to induce him to undertake the premiership.[2] Later in the day Salisbury wrote to Hicks-Beach that Hartington had countered his arguments in his usual sleepy manner, but that evidently he had made up his mind for he had ended by reading from a manuscript a long extract setting out the reasons for his refusal.[3] Salisbury would not accept an immediate refusal and Hartington agreed to consult his colleagues, and to send their formal reply that night.[4]

It is likely that the manuscript referred to is one which is still among Hartington's papers.[5] In it he set out in some thirteen hundred words the case against

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1 The Queen to Salisbury, 22 July 1886, The letters of Queen Victoria, 3rd Series, I. 164-5, and Cecil III, 307-8.

2 Salisbury to Hicks-Beach, 24 July 1886, Cecil, III. 310.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Chats. 340. 2025.

Liberal Unionists taking part in a coalition. This document coupled with Salisbury's account to Hicks Beach makes one sceptical of the statement, in a letter which Hartington wrote to Goschen,[1] that the conclusive factor in his declining to form a government was that Salisbury said he could not sit in a cabinet with Chamberlain.

Hartington saw James, Northbrook, Derby, Stalbridge[2] and perhaps others and sent his reply that night to Salisbury. (It is very largely a summary of the document just referred to). He wrote :

> . . . I have come to the conclusion that the difficulties in the way of my forming a Government are so insuperable that it would be useless for me to attempt it.
>
> I have had some means of ascertaining the opinions of the unofficial, as well as the ex-official members of the Liberal Unionist party, and I am convinced that I could not obtain the support of the whole or nearly the whole of them for a Government the main strength of which must be Conservative. They have represented themselves to their constituents as Liberals, and nothing will induce many of them to act with Conservatives in general opposition to Liberals.
>
> . . . The important fact is that the Liberal opposition to Home Rule would be broken up, and the section of the party which declined to follow me would inevitably gravitate towards the Home Rule portion of the party led by Mr. Gladstone.

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1 Hartington to Goschen, 24 July 1886, Holland, II. 171, and Elliot, II. 96-97.

2 Hartington to Salisbury (draft), 24 July 1886, Chats. 340.2024 (Holland II. 169-70); and Hartington to Goschen, 24 July 1886.

> . . . national as well as party interests are concerned in a step which, so far as it might succeed at all, would have the effect of withdrawing from the Liberal party all its most moderate elements, and leaving it a purely Radical and Democratic party.
>
> . . . If Home Rule is to be resisted it must be, not by the Conservatives alone, but by the assistance of a party which not only is, but is acknowledged to be, Liberal. There is no name which could be invented which would prevent an Administration resting mainly on the support of 320 Conservatives being, in the public estimation, a Conservative Administration. The Liberal resistance to Home Rule would devolve on Mr. Chamberlain and his friends, whose position would shortly become un-tenable, and the Liberal party as a whole would soon be identified with Home Rule.
>
> I believe, therefore, that . . . the most useful part which I can now take is to afford you an independent but friendly support. In this course I think that I can rely on the assistance of Mr. Chamberlain, though I have had but little conversation with him since the elections. At all events, I am sure that it is in this position alone that his active co-operation with me will be possible, and that it is of the greatest importance to secure it.[1]

There were few Conservatives of outstanding ability to whom Salisbury could turn for his cabinet. This time he decided to concentrate on the premiership and gave the Foreign Office to Iddesleigh.[2] Hicks-Beach declined to remain in the leadership of the Commons and was given instead the Irish Chief Secretaryship. Churchill became both leader in the Commons and Chancellor of the Exchequer. His appointment

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1 Hartington to Salisbury, 24 July 1886.

2 He had offered it first to Lord Lyons and then to Lord Cranbrook.

was widely commented on and made many Conservatives uneasy. No one doubted his ability, but had he sufficient stability and balance?[1]

The Liberal Unionists were resolved that they should be an independent Liberal group, and that they should be publicly recognized as one. They had two good reasons: it was the only course which would meet with the approval of the Liberal Unionist electors, and it promised the maximum of influence on government policy. Later there were to be differences between Chamberlainites and Hartingtonians on what Liberal Unionist independence should involve, but never on the principle.

The Liberal Unionist determination to be fully independent led at once to the question of where they should sit in the new parliament. Hartington thought that below the gangway on the opposition side would be best,[2] but Chamberlain,[3] James[4], Derby[5], Craig Sellar[6],

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1 Hartington wrote to Goschen, "R.Churchill is certainly a dangerous experiment; but as he would in any case have been the real Leader, or have influenced the Leader, it may be better that he should have the responsibility as well as the power". (1 Aug. 1886, quotation, Elliot, II. 101).

2 Hartington to Selborne, 4 Aug. 1886, Earl of Selborne, Memorials : Personal and political, 1865-95, II. 233; Holland, II. 174; and Garvin, II. 266.

3 Chamberlain to Sir H. James, 23 July 1886, Chats. 340.2022.

4 Chamberlain to Hartington, 28 July 1886, Chats. 340.2030.

5 Derby to Hartington, 4 Aug. 1886, Chats. 340.2036.

6 A.Craig Sellar to Hartington, 28 July 1886, Chats. 340.2029.

Heanage,[1] and probably others were agreed that it would be most expedient to sit with the Gladstonians as though there had been no party split. The plea of Wolmer[2] that the proper place was below the gangway on the ministerial side carried little weight as it was recognised that few Liberal Unionists would consent to it.[3] After much discussion and correspondence, and not until Hartington had asked Gladstone if he had any objection, or could suggest any other arrangement,[4] the plan to sit with the Gladstonians was adopted. The decision was confirmed at the meeting of Liberal Unionist members held on 5 August and was perserved in until the defeat of the Conservatives in 1892.

A most uncomfortable arrangement it proved to be and one prolific in incidents which bred and intensified ill-will. Augustine Birrell, who was elected as a Gladstonian in 1889, records how he often saw Gladstonians and Liberal Unionists

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1 Ibid.

2 Lord Wolmer to Goschen, 30 July 1886, Chats. 340.2032; and Lord Wolmer to A.Craig Sellar, 30 July 1886, Chats. 340.2031.

3 Hartington to Selborne, 4 Aug. 1886, Earl of Selborne, op. cit., II 233-4; Goschen to Hartington, 1 Aug. 1886, Chats. 340.2033; and Goschen to the Queen, 12 Aug. 1886, Letters of Queen Victoria, 3rd Series, I.175.

4 Hartington to Gladstone, 3 Aug. 1886, Add. Mss. 44148, f. 236 (Holland, II. 175); and Granville to Spencer, 5 Aug. 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp.

edging one another off benches.[1] The arrangement made more effective Chamberlain's stabbing thrusts, but was disconcerting and very much of a trial for most speakers. Even Gladstone with his long experience once admitted how he was chilled when in his orations he would swing towards his own benches and find himself staring into the frigid and disapproving face of the Liberal Unionist, R.B.Finlay.[2]

Chamberlain came through the election with undiminished prestige and in the new Commons was as marked a man as he had been in the previous one. But no longer was his following swollen by the men who, although not Chamberlainites, had rallied to him because they shared his objections to the Irish bills. In addition his parliamentary strength was no longer magnified by it being his to tip the balance. Hartington's larger following now gave that power to him, and as a rule Chamberlain would be able to share it only in so far as he might be identified with Hartington.

Perhaps one result of the new situation was that the Chamberlainites dropped much of the independent, self-

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1 Augustine Birrell, Things past redress, 120.

2 Ibid.

sufficient attitude which they had maintained towards the moderate Liberal Unionists. At the beginning of August Chamberlain, Caine, Collings and other Radical Unionists joined the Liberal Unionist Committee[1], and on the 5th of that month Chamberlain publicly recognised Hartington as leader at a pre-session meeting of the Liberal Unionist members.[2]

Chamberlain was still "The Radical," but he no longer displayed quite the old truculence. His outlook was based on the belief that once the seventy-seven years old Gladstone should have disappeared from politics, his Irish policy would be abandoned by his followers and Liberal reunion follow.[3] He held that until then the Liberal Unionist policy must be, not only to help to retain the Conservatives in office, but to use their full influence to induce them to promote "Liberal" measures.[4] His close association with

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1 The Times, 9 August 1886.

2 Ibid., 6 August 1886.

3 Chamberlain to Hartington, 16 July 1886, Chats. 340.2021 (Holland, II. 168-9); Chamberlain to James, 14 July 1886, Lord Askwith, Lord James of Hereford, 186, and 23 July 1886, Chats. 340.2022; Chamberlain to Dilke, 10 July 1886, Add. Mss. 43877, f.54; Chamberlain to Jesse Collings, 29 July 1886, q.w.o., Garvin, II. 264-5; and Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 231.

4 Ibid.

Churchill, whose influence in Conservative councils was surpassed by that of Salisbury alone, would lead him to hope that his own views would be felt in the making of Government policy. He had also the more formal, but useful, contact with the administration through Hartington.

Many of the Gladstonians in the new parliament had very bitter feelings towards Chamberlain. They considered him responsible for the defeat of Gladstone's administration and the subsequent Liberal disaster in the general election and could not forgive him. As the parliament progressed these bitter feelings were to become increasingly intense and increasingly widespread among Gladstonians. The key to this development was not so much a growing divergence in political views as the recognition by the Gladstonians that they had in Chamberlain a determined, influential enemy whose attacks they were unable to repay in kind. As Lucy noted in his diary, "they hate their lost leader with a hate that is more than hate. Singly or in battalion they are impotent against him in debate."[1] Their vicious attacks appeared to leave him unperturbed and, more exasperating still, Chamberlain continued to retain an important position in parliament and the country, and was widely credited with a liberalizing influence on Government policy. Had he been a political failure they would probably have forgiven him much. The Conservatives in the new parliament were thankful, of course, to have Chamberlain's abilities and influence on their side. Nevertheless, many,

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[1] Sir H.W.Lucy, A diary of the Salisbury parliament, 480.

and not all of them die-hard Tories, had still no great liking for the man and would have agreed with Lady Monkswell when at a later date she jotted in her diary, "It is wonderful how his great, bad qualities have been guided to do so much good work for us in fighting Home Rule."[1]

On 23 July Chamberlain wrote a letter to James, which was intended for Hartington as well, and gave his views on what should be the Government's policy. He wrote :

> . . . I hope they are in no hurry to settle the Irish question. They may fairly claim time for consideration and if I were in their Government I should urge the immediate issue of a small practical commission to enquire into the working of the Land Acts and especially into the condition and organisation of the small tenants. Whether they should not go further and make some temporary provision against unreasonable evictions is a more difficult question, but if they do not do this there will certainly be a refusal to pay rent and outrages.
>
> When Parliament meets in October I should appoint a committee of both Houses to consider the whole question of Irish Government, and then I should take Procedure as the first business after supply.
>
> The question of Coercion does not immediately arise, but if there is an outburst of crime I should be ready to vote for any reasonable provisions to secure the execution of the law.
>
> I hope they will take the "Times" advice and appoint Irishmen to all Irish posts.. . .[2]

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1 Lady Monkswell's diary, 17 June 1895, A victorian diarist, 1873-1895 (edited, E.C.F.Collier), 271.

2 Chamberlain to James, 23 July 1886, Chats. 340. 2022.

Five days later he wrote directly to Hartington but on the Government's policy confined himself to remarking that they should not attempt to suppress the National League without first obtaining statistics of outrage from the evidence of a committee.[1] On 1st August he again wrote to him and this time dealt primarily with Government policy :

> I entirely approve of the postponement until February of any attempt to deal with Ireland. . . .
>
> But I am very strongly in favour of the immediate announcement of a small Royal Commission to enquire into the land question.. . . If it were settled I doubt if Home Rule would be any longer a burning question.
>
> My idea is that the Commission should be non political and consist of really practical men including at least a couple of good land agents. I should offer a seat to Healy.. . .
>
> A very important question arises as to whether the Commission - or another, should enquire into the question of public works, main drainings, communications, fisheries and the revival of any industry suitable to the country.
>
> I have a fair belief that money expended wisely and prudently and in connection with some large complete and well considered plan of improvement would be a great investment.. . .
>
> As regards Local Government in all its forms I think that the Cabinet should consider the subject carefully and decide how far they will go. Then let them introduce their scheme in February in the shape of resolutions and refer these to a very strong committee -

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1 Chamberlain to Hartington, 28 July 1886, Chats.340.2030.

perhaps a joint committee of both Houses to consider and report.. . . [1]

These recommendations of Chamberlain surprise one by the unwonted note of caution. He wished most of all, it would seem, to avoid having controversial questions in the new parliament and thus he advocated royal commissions so that the way might be smoothed for the more important legislation, and inter-party controversy reduced to a minimum. Probably for the same reason he recommended the Conservatives to avoid introducing "vital questions".[2] His attitude is understandable. A struggle between the Government and the Opposition on an important issue would gravely endanger Liberal Unionist unity and might cost them secessions, and further, would either widen the breach with the Gladstonians or else endanger the Government.

Hartington appears to have been thinking along lines rather similar to Chamberlain. At any rate he agreed in principle with some of his main conclusions. At an interview with Salisbury on 6 August he recommended the Government "to take time in considering Irish measures, and to institute enquiry into Land question and local improvements and several other

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1 Chamberlain to Hartington, 1 Aug. 1886, Chats. 340.2037 (q.w.o., Garvin II. 265-6).

2 Salisbury to Churchill, 20 Aug. 1886, Churchill, II. 136.

small reforms."[1]

The Gladstonians were appalled by the decisiveness of their defeat at the polls. Most of them, from Gladstone[2] downwards and including the expert Schnadhorst, had entered the contest with optimism and they tended to react to the other extreme and to regard their defeat as being even more decisive, and a greater disaster than it was. Their alliance with the Nationalists gave them uneasy forebodings. They assumed that the new Government would be met with defiance and outrage in Ireland, and that willingly or unwillingly the Nationalist party would be involved,[3] with the indirect result that the unionists would be able to represent the Gladstonians as the associates and patrons

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1 Salisbury to the Queen (cypher telegram), 6 Aug. 1886, Letters of Queen Victoria, 3rd Series, I. 172.

2 In a letter to the Queen (2 July) Gladstone mentioned that the predictions of the experts were favourable to his party and that there was a popular enthusiasm in the Liberal masses such as he had never seen equalled. He stated that the Conservatives had little chance, if any, of a majority in the new parliament, but that the majority, no matter whose it was, would be a small one. (q.w.o., P. Guedella, The Queen and Mr. Gladstone, II. 415-16).

3 e.g. Spencer to Granville, 2 Sept. 1886, "I think the position is very disagreeable, we cannot go hand in glove with the Parnellites, their methods are not ours, yet we must keep with them. There will be nasty work in Ireland . . ." (P.R.O., 30.29.29A).

of the instigators of crime and lawlessness.

This Gladstonian mood of despondency and frustration probably intensified their desire for Liberal reunion, and especially as they tended to underestimate the extent and nature of the chasm which home rule and the general election had now driven between themselves and the Liberal Unionists. Even Gladstone in the second week of July assumed that in the new parliament most or many of the Liberal Unionist rank and file would still be his followers except upon home rule.[1] He even feared lest they might support a powerless Gladstonian government in preference to a Conservative one.[2] Quite a few Gladstonians were willing to purchase reunion at the price of a compromise on home rule and, except among the Radicals, this willingness appears to have been stronger and more widespread than the newspapers of the time indicate. To take but one illustration, Granville after a dinner at the Edinburgh Liberal Club at the end of September reported to

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1 Gladstone to Granville, 6 July 1886, P.R.O., 30.29.29A.

2 Gladstone to Granville, 9 July 1886, ibid.

Gladstone that half the company had been Liberal Unionists "which was supposed to be a triumph", and that there had been more talk of bridging the gap than he quite liked.[1] Of the Gladstonians opposed to compromise the more responsible were nonetheless desirous of reunion. Gladstone himself stated that next to settling the Irish question he desired most to reunite the party.[2] He assumed that the Liberal Unionist leaders were his out and out antagonists[3] and so, instead of approaching either of them, he decided to sound Sir Henry James on the possibility of party reconciliation. By leaders Gladstone presumably meant Hartington and Chamberlain, against whom he was just then quite embittered. Hartington, he complained, was much more active now that he was against him than he had ever been as a friend and colleague.[4] But Hartington was, he admitted, a gentleman, whereas of Chamberlain it was, he declared, best not to speak.[5]

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1 Granville to Gladstone, 30 Sept. 1886, Add. Mss. 44179, f. 182.

2 Gladstone to Harcourt (copy), 2 Aug. 1886, Add. Mss. 44548, p. 245.

3 Gladstone to Granville, 6 July 1886.

4 Ibid.

5 Gladstone to Granville, 9 July 1886.

Gladstone approached James through Sir E.W. Hamilton. Hamilton wrote asking James for a talk and they met on the evening of 9 July.[1] He told James that Gladstone wished to discuss with him ways of uniting the party. James replied that he was advising Hartington not to join a Conservative ministry and that he thought Gladstone and he should not meet until the ministry had been formed lest people should say that Gladstone had influenced him.[2] Hamilton also informed James that, while Gladstone would not ask to see Hartington, he would gladly meet him if Hartington desired it.[3] Eleven days later Hamilton had a further, but perhaps accidental, meeting with James. Afterwards he reported through Mrs. Gladstone that James was as loyal to Gladstone as ever, and that he thought Gladstone should have a talk with him later on.[4]

In contrast to Gladstone, Harcourt was eager to approach

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1 James' memorandum on the meeting, quoted, Lord Askwith, Lord James of Hereford, 185-6.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Sir E.W. Hamilton to Mrs. Gladstone, 21 July 1886, Add. Mss. 44191, f. 80.

Chamberlain. On 20 July he wrote to Chamberlain suggesting that they meet for a discussion. His views, he informed him, were very much what they had been in the previous December - namely that, if Gladstone insisted on home rule, home rule had to be tried. "It has been tried," he continued, "and for the present has failed. Whether anything else will succeed better remains to be seen. If not, Home Rule will have to be revived in some other form."[1] Some days later Chamberlain paid Harcourt a visit and they discussed reunion. Harcourt forwarded an account of the conversation to Gladstone, but unfortunately the letter appears to be lost. Gladstone replied that the test of Chamberlain's statements must be in his acts and that the coming by-election for East Birmingham (caused by the appointment of Henry Matthews to the Home Secretaryship) would supply such a test. Chamberlain's genial words, he added, were worn out by frequent use. But the letter did contain one positive suggestion. Gladstone observed that he had even asked himself whether the new parliament could frame some form of initial plan of federation and deal with the Irish part of it first, and that that, if feasible, would correspond with one at least

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1 Harcourt to Chamberlain, 20 July 1886, q.w.o., Gardiner, II. 3-4.

of Chamberlain's many declarations.[1]

Later, towards the end of August, Gladstone published a lengthy manifesto[2] in which he sought to prove his consistency on home rule and to extract gleams of hope from the election results. One interesting aspect of it was that, as the Annual Register noted, "it was interpreted generally as an invitation to the Liberal Unionists to return to their allegiance, by minimising the points of difference between the various sections of the party."[3]

The Liberal Unionists were no less eager for reunion than the Gladstonians. On the assembling of Parliament their leaders requested that Liberal Unionists should receive the Gladstonian party whip like ordinary Gladstonians.[4] This request was granted and the practice was continued in the Commons until at least the following summer,[5] and in the Lords apparently

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1 Gladstone to Harcourt (copy), 2 Aug. 1886, Add. Mss. 44548, p. 245 (Gardiner, II. 4-5).

2 The Irish question : history of an idea; lessons of the election, pp. 68.

3 Annual Register, 1886, p. 274.

4 A.Morley to Gladstone, 6 Jan. 1887, Add. Mss. 44253, f. 54; Granville to Gladstone, 20 Jan. 1887, Add. Mss. 44180, f. 12; and A. Morley to Granville, 21 Jan. 1887, P.R.O., 30.29.28A.

5 Jesse Collings to A. Morley, 1 April 1887, Liberal Unionist, 6 April 1887, p.19.

until a much later date.[1]

The Liberal Unionist members met at Devonshire House on the morning of the opening of the new parliament (5 August) and Hartington made the first official statement of policy. He reminded his listeners that they, and not Parnell, now held the balance of power, and that they would be able to use it both to prevent the return of a Liberal government committed to the disruption of the Empire, and to prevent the Conservative government from taking retrograde or dangerous steps either in foreign affairs or domestic legislation. Their duty, he said, was to remain united as a security against a revival of the disruptive policy, and as the basis for the reconstruction of a sound Liberal party. He explained that these two objects would govern their attitude to all questions involving the existence of the Government. They would continue to be Liberals, he stated, and would not unnecessarily, or ostentatiously, constitute themselves a separate party. He expressed the hope that they would be able to act in common with non-unionist Liberals on many subjects.

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1 In Jan. 1888 Spencer suggested to Granville that the Gladstonian peers should be asked by private notes to be present on the first night of the session as Liberal Unionists would not know who had received these notes. Further, he thought the usual "opening of the session" circular should be sent to both Gladstonian and Liberal Unionist peers. (Spencer to Granville, 19 Jan. 1888, P.R.O., 30.29.29A).

He said that he believed that should the Government require more time to consider Irish and other measures they should be given it. He dealt also with the question of where Liberal Unionist members should sit in the House and the reasons which led him to decline the premiership. He explained that his acceptance of the premiership would have made permanent the breach with the Gladstonians; would have destroyed Liberal Unionist unity as only a fraction of them would have supported him; and that a Liberal head and a few Liberal members would not have been sufficient to prevent the Government from being virtually a Conservative one.

After short speeches by other Liberal Unionists Chamberlain rose. He said that he agreed with the policy laid down by Hartington, and that he recognised his leadership and would support actions taken by him. He expressed confidence that now that the country had shown its approval of the unionist cause Liberals would ere long find a basis of agreement. Nevertheless, he advocated that Liberal Unionists should in the meantime achievegreater unity. He suggested in particular that the Liberal Unionist Committee and the National Radical Union should associate more closely. Also, he said that he

believed the party should have its own whips and expressed the hope that another whip would be appointed in addition to W.S. Caine. (Lord Edward Cavendish became the second whip a few days later).

The unionist press was well satisfied with the policy laid down by Hartington and with Chamberlain's unreserved acceptance of his leadership. It also noted with satisfaction the news that Chamberlain had joined the Liberal Unionist Committee. The one fly which it found in the ointment was Chamberlain's attitude in the by-election for East Birmingham where Henry Matthews was threatened with opposition by W.T.G. Cook. Cook had stood in the general election as a Gladstonian, but now came forward with a more Chamberlainite programme. Chamberlain was frantically appealed to, especially by Churchill,[1] to use his influence which was believed would be decisive. He, however, in keeping with his policy of doing nothing which might seem to identify him in any way with the Conservatives for some time declined to interfere. Finally he did intervene and Cook withdrew - but by then The Times was able to point out that Cook's action had been taken only after canvasses had shown Matthew's return to be certain.[2]

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1 Churchill, II. 133-4

2 The Times, 12 Aug. 1886, p.9.

The new parliament assembled on 5 August, but after the re-election of A.W.Peel to the speakership and certain routine business was adjourned for a fortnight. The Government's plan was a short session to deal with the estimates and then to adjourn until February. When Parliament reassembled on the 19th, a brief speech from the throne[1] disclosed that the Government intended to pass the estimates of the previous ministry, but made no reference to Irish, home, or oversea questions. Later Salisbury in the Lords[2] and Churchill in the Commons[3] gave a fuller indication of the Government's intentions. As had been recommended by Hartington and Chamberlain, two royal commissions were to be appointed: one to examine the Land Acts of 1881 and 1885 and the possibility of extending them, and the other to examine the feasibility of developing the resources of Ireland by public expenditure, especially on fisheries, arterial drainage, and communications. Local government bills for Great Britain and Ireland, both of them based on the same principles, would be ready,

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1 Hansard, CCCVIII, cols. 20-21.

2 Ibid., cols. 55-70.

3 Ibid., cols. 113-33.

it was hoped, for February. Finally, it was planned that Major-General Sir Redvers Buller should take charge, with direct responsibility to the Chief Secretary, of the police in Kerry and certain neighbouring districts where moonlighting was most rife.

The main event of the session was the Tenant Relief Bill introduced by Parnell on 10 September. The bill was badly drafted, and although the Gladstonians supported it, they showed little enthusiasm. Gladstone speaking on its behalf objected to many of its provisions, but said that he approved the principle.[1] Nonetheless, the bill was an embarrassment to Liberal Unionists and gave them a practical demonstration of the difficulties inherent in their position. The Government was eager for their support,[2] but they were divided both on the merits of the bill and on the expediency of supporting the Government. Chamberlain wrote to Hartington (7 September) that if, as he expected, the bill should contain provisions which he had publicly supported in the past he could not possibly oppose it and that the best course for all Radical Unionists would be to absent themselves from the debate. He advised Hartington to take

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1 Ibid., CCCIX, cols. 1044-60

2 Salisbury to Hartington, 12 Sept. 1886, Chats. 340.2045; and Churchill to Hartington, 13 Sept. 1886, Chats. 340.2049 (q.w.o., Churchill, II. 148, but with no indication of the omissions).

the same course and pointed out that if the Gladstonians were to see a rift in the Liberal Unionist party they would endeavour to widen it by new proposals. He urged that the Government would have a majority without the Liberal Unionists, and that in addition they had not been consulted before Parnell was given permission to introduce the bill.[1] Two days later he again wrote. After once more pleading the inadvisability of Whigs and Radicals taking different courses he expressed the hope that the Government would not yield an inch to Parnell because if they did it would rehabilitate him in the eyes of the Irish tenants. He explained that he would have preferred the Government to have proposed measures for preventing harsh eviction, but now that they had not done so it would be a fatal mistake to accept any proposal from Parnell because the only chance for the future was that the Irish people should see that they could gain no more by agitation.[2] Chamberlain was thus primarily interested, not in the merits of demerits of the bill, but in adopting the most expedient tactic.

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1 Chamberlain to Hartington, 7 Sept. 1886, Chats. 340.2042 (q.w.o. Garvin, II. 268-9).

2 Chamberlain to Hartington, 9 Sept. 1886, Chats. 340.2043 (q.w.o., Garvin, II. 268-9).

Chamberlain's second letter is of special interest as in it he dealt with the wider problem of which the Parnell bill difficulty was a manifestation.

> . . . Our great difficulty, he wrote, is that in order to preserve the Union we are forced to keep the Tory Government in power. But every time we vote with them we give a shock to the ordinary Liberal politicians outside, and if we do it too often, we shall be completely identified with the Tories and we shall lose all chance of recovering the lead of the Liberal Party. Our real policy is never to vote with the Tories unless they are in danger and to vote against them whenever we can safely do so, This policy would be the best for them as well as for us, for if we lose our hold on Liberal opinion, we can bring them no strength on critical occasions.
>
> The result of any other course will be that what I may call your section will gravitate to the Tories and will be absorbed by them; while mine will make their peace with the Gladstonians.. . .

Hartington was less extreme in his attitude to Parnell's bill than was Chamberlain. On 10 September he wrote to Salisbury that if the Government should oppose the second reading he would vote with them for he believed that Parnell would be unable to draft an eviction suspending clause which would not encourage tenants to refuse rent which they were able to pay. At the same time he emphasised that evictions should be kept to a minimum, and suggested that the Government should consider accepting any provisions in the bill which the Irish administration might think advisable.[1] Hartington also

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1 Hartington to Salisbury, 10 Sept. 1886, Holland, II. 176-7.

put forward this latter suggestion to Churchill and Hicks-Beach.[1] Hicks-Beach, too, favoured the adoption of part of the bill.[2 & 3] Hartington expected that Parnell would make his measure as moderate as possible on the assumption that it was certain to be rejected by the Government.[4] However, when the bill was laid before the Commons Hartington found that by his standards it was far from moderate. In the debate he denounced it as a device from stopping the payment of rent throughout Ireland and as an attempt to dispense with the Common Law.[5]

In the division on the second reading (21 September) the Government was supported by only thirty-one Liberal Unionists, but had a majority of ninety-five. Chamberlain

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1 Hartington to Churchill (draft), 14 Sept. 1886, Chats. 340.2050 (Churchill, II. 149-50).

2 Lady Victoria Hicks-Beach, Life of Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, I.284; and Churchill, II.219.

3 Afterwards the false story circulated that the Cabinet, influenced by Churchill and Matthews, had inclined towards meeting in a conciliatory spirit Parnell's proposals for the staying of evictions, "but that Lord Hartington made the support of the Unionists dependant upon a distinct refusal to make terms with the Irish Nationalists." (The quotation is from Annual Register, 1886, p. 278).

4 Hartington to Salisbury, 10 Sept. 1886.

5 Hansard, CCCIX, cols. 1152-65.

abstained[1] and one Liberal Unionist, J.W.Barclay (Forfarshire), supported the opposition. Four days later Parliament was prorogued.

Early in October Chamberlain left for a holiday in Turkey and Greece from which he did not return until 13 December. Shortly before leaving he called with Dilke who recorded that "he seemed to think that he could keep Mr. Gladstone out for life, and was persuaded that Randolph could give him all he wanted and leave Hartington and Salisbury in the lurch".[2] This at best was probably but a crude description of Chamberlain's views. Nevertheless, Chamberlain had cause for satisfaction in early October for many things indicated that Tory Democracy was in the ascendant in the Cabinet, and that his own opinions were having their influence there.

Hicks-Beach's task in Ireland promised to be an unusually difficult one. The low prices for farm products boded ill for peace and, unlike his predecessors, he had neither a "coercion act" to strengthen his hand nor the co-operation of the Nationalist leaders. In addition, certain landlords were determined to have their full

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1 J.L.Hammond in Gladstone and the Irish nation (p.563) wrongly stated that Chamberlain voted with the Government.

2 Dilke's memoir, Gwynn and Tuckwell, II. 265.

legal dues irrespective of whether their tenants could pay. Hicks-Beach set himself against such folly and did his best to induce landlords to be moderate in dealing with tenants. He even warned Lord Clanricarde, an absentee and one of the most grasping of landlords,[1] that if he continued to refuse all rent reductions he would find on applying for police and military to carry out evictions that "compliance with the request would certainly be retarded by the pressure of other claims and duties, and would most probably be postponed to the utmost extent permitted by law".[2]

On 21 October United Ireland in an article entitled the "Plan of Campaign" urged tenants to take collective action against oppressive landlords. It proposed that tenants on an estate where the landlord refused to reduce rents should pay what they themselves considered the appropriate rent into an "estate fund" which would be used in the fight with the landlord, and especially to assist evicted tenants. Blacklegs were, of course, to

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1 The enforcement of evictions on the Clanricarde estate cost the State £27,895 in twelve years. (Report of Evicted Tenants Commission, 1893).

2 Hicks-Beach to Clanricarde, 25 Oct. 1886, Lady Victoria Hicks-Beach, Life of Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, I.292-4.

be boycotted. Timothy Harrington, a Nationalist member of Parliament, had been given the idea of the scheme by an episode which had taken place earlier in the year on the Woodford estate of Lord Clanricarde, There the tenants, when their request for a reduction in their exorbitant rents had been refused, had agreed among themselves to pay no rent until their request should be conceded. Clanricarde had replied by ordering evictions, which were so strenuously resisted that they had to be enforced by no less than five hundred policemen.

The Plan of Campaign was a very practical tactic and a number of nationalist leaders (especially Dillon and O'Brien) were soon active in organising its application. Parnell, at last conscious of the importance of public opinion in Great Britain, disapproved[1], but did not openly oppose it.

Plan of Campaign methods entailed serious hazards for those adopting them and as a result were resorted to only on estates where landlord-tenant relations were acute and embittered. But there was a sufficient number of such estates to make that winter the most disturbed which Ireland had known since 1882. By the end

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1 Parnell's speech at Eighty Club, 8 May 1888, The Times, 9 May 1888; and R.B.O'Brien, The life of Charles Stewart Parnell, II.90.

of the year the Plan of Campaign had been adopted on forty estates,[1] and during the months which followed the number gradually increased until finally it stood at eighty-four.[2] The scheme was a success in that it resulted in an agreement between the landlord and his tenants on sixty of the eighty-four estates[3], and had a moderating influence on all landlords. But it had also a dark side for a number of landlords did not capitulate, but evicted their tenants and replaced them by Scots. Not until 1907 were these evicted people, or their successors, enabled to return to their holdings.

It had been known for some time that Hartington wished to leave during the recess for a holiday in India. The Conservative leaders were disturbed at the news. In a letter to Hartington on 13 September Churchill wrote that if the visit to India should mean Hartington's absence until March or April the Government would fall through lack of his support in Parliament, and that Hartington would then have to try to form a ministry.[4] Churchill's letter was a little hysterical and Hartington

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1 Annual Register, 1886, p.316

2 J.L.Hammond, Gladstone and the Irish Nation, 566.

3 Ibid.

4 Churchill to Hartington, 13 Sept. 1886, Chats. 340.2049 (q.w.o., Churchill, II. 148).

may have discounted the forebodings in it.

More than a month later the Queen,[1] Salisbury,[2] and Hicks-Beach[3] all wrote on the same day to dissuade him from going to India. The Queen appealed to him "in the strongest terms" not to go. It might be necessary, she wrote, especially because of the serious foreign situation, to call Parliament earlier than planned, but that even without such a necessity it was "of the utmost importance for his party that he should be here to keep them together and to prevent <u>others</u> being brought too much to the front". The Queen's letter alone must have ensured Hartington's presence during the following months.

The letters of Salisbury and Hicks-Beach illustrate not only the importance which both men attached to Hartington's presence in the Commons, but also the value which they placed on the expectation of being able to consult with him when drafting the Government's more important measures. Salisbury wrote:

> . . . No one is competent to supply your place, either in keeping your party together or in enabling the Government to avoid proposals that would be unwelcome to it. I do not apprehend

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1 The Queen to Hartington, 19 Oct. 1886, Chats. 340.2053A (q.w.o., Holland, II. 178).

2 Salisbury to Hartington, 19 Oct. 1886, Chats. 340.2053.

3 Hicks-Beach to Hartington, 19 Oct. 1886, Chats. 340.2054.

> that we shall get to actual legislation very early: the question of the rules of the House will probably occupy some time. But we may not be able to avoid laying our measures on the table at an early date - and it is possible that we shall have to include among them a Local Government Bill for Ireland. If so - it would be a very serious misfortune if we had to frame it, without the advantage of being able to know your mind on some of the thorny questions which it involves. Consultation may also be necessary on the Local Government Bill for England and on the framing of the clauses. But they are less important. . . .

Hicks-Beach in a letter to Hartington on 22 October wrote that he had learned from Stalbridge that Hartington wished to confer with the Government in the working out of Irish policy. "I feel, therefore, bound to add", he continued, "that in my opinion your absence from England would be a most serious loss to us, and might indeed lead to fatal differences between the Liberal Unionists and ourselves: for there is obviously no one who could speak for them on such matters with your authority, or in whom we could so completely confide".[1] A letter which Stalbridge wrote to Hartington, also on the 22nd, throws additional light on Hicks-Beach's attitude to co-operation with him.

> . . . I gathered that he not only intended, but was anxious to consult you, and you alone as representing the Liberal Unionists with regard to their policy in Ireland, when it was put into shape, but that there was little prepared as yet . . . He pointed out what we know very well, that they would have some difficulty in communicating with Joe C., but he went so far as to say that it would be imperatively

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1 Hicks-Beach to Hartington, 22 Oct. 1886, Chats. 340.2055.

> necessary for him to be in communication with you when they were in a position to formulate their Irish policy.. . .[1]

The Government was not disappointed in its hope of close consultation with Hartington in drafting the more controversial parts of their proposed domestic and Irish legislation.[2] During the remainder of the year Liberal Unionist opinion as expressed by him played an important part in their councils. This was especially so at one stage in the development of the local government scheme. The original plan was to set up county and district councils based on household sufferage. However, when the Cabinet discovered that that would involve the abolition of the boards of guardians and would give the farm workers a decisive say in the administration of the poor law they all, with the exception of Churchill, agreed that they had best confine their scheme for the present to the creation of county councils.[3] Salisbury admitted to Cranbrook that he was in "some despair" over the problem,

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1 Stalbridge to Hartington, 22 Oct. 1886, Chats. 340.2056.

2 A letter from Salisbury to Hartington (16 Nov. 1886, Chats. 340.2062), in which the Anglo-German agreement on the slave trade is the chief topic, indicates that the consultations sometimes ranged beyond home and Irish legislation.

3 Salisbury to the Queen, 26 Nov. 1886, Letters of Queen Victoria, 3rd Series, I. 226-7.

and that their difficulties were considerably aggravated because the Liberal Unionists would undoubtedly agree with Churchill.[1] On the following evening Salisbury had a pre-arranged meeting with Hartington and found that he, instead of agreeing with Churchill, admitted the poor law difficulty and even proposed that the local government scheme for Great Britain should be postponed in favour of one for Ireland.[2] He reasoned that it would avoid the poor law difficulty as no one was "foolish enough to wish to give absolute power over the Poor Law to the Irish agricultural labourer". He said that in addition Gladstone would challenge the Government to produce their Irish plan at once and that if they did not do so it might not be possible to hold together the Liberal Unionists.[3] Perhaps as important a factor as any with Hartington may have been the fear that the franchise problem would result in a dangerous quarrel between the Radicals and the more moderate Liberal Unionists.

Salisbury's colleagues disapproved of Hartington's

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1 Salisbury to Cranbrook, 25 Nov. 1886, Cecil, III.327.

2 Salisbury to the Queen, 26 Nov. 1886, Letters of Queen Victoria, 3rd Series, I.227, and Cecil, III. 228.

3 Salisbury to the Queen, 26 Nov. 1886.

proposal[1] and he himself soon came to doubt its wisdom.[2] Churchill's biographer claims that Churchill "succeeded, by the influence of a friend, in persuading Lord Hartington to abate his Irish claims,"[3] but one would not be surprised if this were an exaggeration and that Hartington was most influenced by the opinions of leading Liberal Unionists. The Cabinet finally decided that the local government scheme for Great Britain should be limited to the creation of county councils, but that in deference to Hartington,[4] the Queen's speech should promise an Irish local government bill at a later date.

At Dartford on 2 October Churchill, speaking as though co-leader, sketched out a programme which The Times Weekly Edition described as "so comprehensive and progressive as to take the old Tories breath away".[5] First he referred to the four principal royal commissions which the Government had decided to set up and made a few complimentary remarks about the Liberal Unionists.

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1 Salisbury to Hartington, 2 Dec. 1886, Chats. 340.2065.

2 Ibid.

3 Churchill, II. 221.

4 Salisbury to Hartington, 2 Dec. 1886.

5 The Times Weekly Edition, 31 Dec. 1886, p.12.

Then, after advocating that parliamentary obstruction be dealt with by a simple majority closure, he launched out. The Government, he told his listeners, would concentrate on the establishment of a genuinely popular form of local government, and that their scheme would involve a re-arrangement and re-adjustment of local taxation, and the taxation of personal property. He hoped that the new local bodies would be able to settle most of the licensing controversies. He said that "it was the decided intention of the Government" to introduce a measure which would enable local authorities to provide farm workers with freehold plots and allotments. He indicated that the tithe law would be altered so that the landlords and not the tenants would make the actual payment of tithe; that a measure would be introduced to cheapen and simplify the buying and selling of land; and that changes would be made in the law governing glebe lands so that they could be sold. He warned the railway companies that unless they abolished rates which favoured foreign interests "their rights and property might be placed in very serious danger and jeopardy". He hinted that there would be legislation in a popular direction when the commission which was sitting on Education should have reported. Turning to Ireland he foreshadowed land legislation to accelerate the change

from double to single ownership, and remarked that the Government would endeavour to lay at least the foundation for Irish local government. His own special object, he promised, would be to keep to the minimum public expenditure, and consequently taxation. In foreign policy he denounced the kidnapping of Prince Alexander of Bulgaria. The liberty-giving policy of the Treaty of Berlin, he said, would have to be maintained, and he intimated that the Central Powers would have Britain's support in a policy of peace and national liberty in the Balkans.

The speech was the most important that Churchill was ever to make. It caused a sensation at home and aroused much interest abroad. In the Conservative party the programme of domestic reform which he outlined gave rise to almost as much consternation as it did satisfaction. The Standard described his remarks on foreign affairs as moderate in tone, sensible, and well expressed, but stated that if several of the domestic reforms which he had mentioned were not passed for the next three or four years the country would not be much the worse for it. Any scheme of small holdings on the lines advocated by Jesse Collings, it warned, would be no boon to the farm workers and would be an encroachment on the very rights of which Churchill claimed to be the champion. It advised that

an appreciable reduction in the national expenditure would probably do more for the stability of the Government than any number of reforms such as Churchill described.[1] The Times commented that nothing could be more reasonable, temperate, and practical than the exposition of ministerial policy, and that the Conservatives had broken with the obsolete tradition of high and dry Toryism.[2] The Daily Telegraph wrote that not a sentence in Churchill's able address conflicted with anything in historical Liberalism, and that the passages on allotments, retrenchment, and law reform would not have misbecome Chamberlain himself.[3] The Daily News considered that there was something startling even to advanced Liberals in the comprehensive radicalism of the Government proposals.[4] If Churchill were to succeed in carrying out his programme, remarked the Birmingham Daily Post, he would go a long way towards "dishing the Radicals."[5]

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1 Standard, 4 Oct. 1886, p.4.

2 The Times, 4 Oct. 1886, p.9.

3 Daily Telegraph, 4 Oct. 1886, p.5.

4 Daily News, 4 Oct. 1886, p.4.

5 Birmingham Daily Post, 4 Oct. 1886, p.4.

Strangely enough, the most important aspect of Churchill's Dartford speech is the one which is still most persistently ignored - namely that, as he assured the annual conference of Conservative associations some three weeks later, he had spoken "with the full knowledge and assent of his colleagues in the Cabinet".[1] In March of the following year Churchill in conversation with Rosebery said, "Oh, as to the Dartford speech. Salisbury came to my room in the House of Commons: I told him the whole of what I was going to say and he approved it all".[2] However, one has not to rely entirely on Churchill's own word. The speech caused much resentment among the right wing Conservatives. The Carlton was reported to be vexed and sulky.[3] Churchill was much criticized for riding rough-shod over the views of his colleagues, and his colleagues were criticized for allowing him to do so. The outcome was that W.H.Smith (Secretary for War) published a letter in The Times on 30 October in which he stated that the Cabinet had both known and approved of the statements which Churchill had made.

The fact that the Cabinet had given its prior consent to Churchill's statements is of special interest in a study of the Liberal Unionist party because it throws a little

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1 Speech to the annual conference of the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations, Bradford, 26 Oct. 1886, The Times, 27 Oct. 1886.

2 Rosebery's account of the conversation, Marquess of Crewe, Lord Rosebery, II. 492.

3 Churchill, II. 175.

light on the difficult question of how far the Liberal Unionists influenced Government policy during the six years of Salisbury's second administration.[1] At the time the Liberal Unionists claimed that the impressive record of reform and constructive legislation was very largely due to a continual goading of the Government by them. This claim has been credited to the Liberal Unionists by very many people ever since. When one remembers Salisbury's Newport speech of October 1885, and secondly, that Churchill had sketched the more important legislation in his Dartford speech with the approval of the Cabinet it becomes evident that one must treat such a view with great caution. The truth seems to be that, inspired by Disraeli's example, progressive Conservatism was in the ascendant, especially in the party leadership, and that the programme for which Churchill was the spokesman would have been largely adopted by the Government even had it not been dependent on the Liberal Unionists for its existence. Looking at the period as a whole the most

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1 This question of Liberal Unionist influence on the Government cannot be answered with confidence until more of the private papers of the Conservative leaders become available for research. The 3rd Marquis of Salisbury papers, which may contain much on the subject, are now (1955) deposited in Christ Church, Oxford, but will not be available until they are catalogued.

important aspect of Liberal Unionist influence appears to have been in counterweighing the strong reactionary forces within the Conservative party which otherwise might have made impossible, or greatly modified, much of the legislation which was passed. This in itself was of much importance and, in addition, Liberal Unionist views often went far in determining the actual details of a measure, and sometimes secured major alterations.[1]

During the weeks following the Dartford speech the suspicion that Salisbury was allowing Government policy to be largely controlled by Churchill and by the Liberal Unionists made many Conservatives increasingly dissatisfied. On the 8 December Salisbury in a speech to the City Conservative Association endeavoured to restore confidence. He assured his followers that the Conservative and Liberal Unionist parties retained their individuality, and that the Conservatives were as attached to their opinions and as resolute to carry them out as ever they were. He took the measures one by one, which it had been admitted that the Government intended to introduce, and he endeavoured to show that all were based on sound Conservative principles

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1 e.g. The Government's concession to the Liberal Unionists in July 1887 of a revision of judicial rents in Ireland. See below p. 402.

and had not been adopted because of Liberal Unionist pressure. "But what I insist on is that these are not new doctrines adopted to please the Liberal Unionists; these things are what we said in opposition," he declared. At the same time Salisbury did not neglect to keep the Liberal Unionist alliance in repair. There were, he said, questions on which Conservatives must differ from at least some of the Liberal Unionists, but, fortunately, those questions were in the background and "the straightforwardness and simplicity of intention" of Hartington and his followers made co-operation with them a very easy task.[1]

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1 The Times, 9 Dec. 1886

The National Liberal Federation held its annual conference in Leeds on 3 November. Objects approved, or re-approved, for the party programme were, county councils, reform of the law governing the holding of land, local option in spirit licensing, "free schools", reforms in parliamentary procedure and electoral registration, and non-intervention in European affairs so that ultimately the army and navy estimates could be reduced. Disestablishment was not formally approved, but a resolution was passed urging equality between the state and the different religious denominations. A resolution which was accepted by most Gladstonians as the official defination of the party's attitude was passed on home rule. The resolution stated that Ireland would have to be given a settlement which would satisfy the views and wishes of the Irish representatives and that the settlement would have to include a legislative body for the management of what Parliament should decide to be distinctly Irish affairs.[1]

Even had he not realized it earlier, the events of the new session must have shown Gladstone very quickly how groundless had been his hopes that many Liberal Unionists would still be his followers on non-home rule questions.

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1 Daily News, 4, and 5 Nov. 1886.

But the realization of how far the two groups were now apart made him only the more eager for a reunion before time and internecine strife should solidify the cleavage. He was alarmed at the radicalism of his followers in the new Commons[1] and he may have been influenced in his reunion eagerness by the desire to counterweigh his Radicals by the Liberal Unionists, whom he regarded as containing at most some six or eight Chamberlainites.[2]

Gladstone had a few of his colleagues to Hawarden for consultation[3] shortly before the annual conference of the National Liberal Federation at Leeds.

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1 He wrote to Harcourt (16 Nov. 1886), "Randolph, by taking up the Liberal programme, has, as was to be expected, caused a superfoetation of Radicalism on our side . . . I will not break with the 200 [i.e. the National Liberal Federation] or the radical section of them if I can help it. But I am rather too old to put on a brand set of new clothes." (Draft, Add. Mss. 44200, f. 178).

2 Gladstone to Harcourt (draft), 8 Jan. 1887, Add. Mss. 44201, f. 21 (q.w.o., Gardiner, II. 26).

3 Ripon to Granville, 6 Nov. 1886, P.R.O., 30.29.22A.

Granville and Morley were present, and probably Harcourt.[1] Gladstonian policy towards the Liberal Unionists was discussed. The conclusion reached appears to have been that for the present no reunion advances should be made to the Liberal Unionists, but that nothing should be done which might further alienate them.[2] Gladstone emphasised that home rule could not be shelved for an indefinite period.[3]

One wonders if Gladstone could have been convinced fully on the undesirability of reunion advances or the shelving of home rule. During the next three weeks he came to the opposite conclusions. On 23 November he set down his new ideas in a memorandum which he showed to Granville and other colleagues. He proposed that there should be a conference between representatives of the two parties - or as he phrased it "an informal meeting and a friendly conversation". The participants, he suggested, should be two or three thorough Liberals from each side who had not been deeply or sharply

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1 Ripon to Granville, 6 Nov. 1886; and Morley to Spencer, 8 Nov. 1886, Miscellaneous, Althorp.

2 Ripon to Granville, 6 Nov. 1886; and the speeches of Morley and Harcourt at the Leed's conference, which, Ripon mentions in his letter to Granville, were based on the conclusions reached at Hawarden.

3 Morley to Spencer, 8 Nov. 1886.

involved in the controversy. The basis for their discussion, he stated, should be the assumption that both groups continued to stand by their views on Irish policy and would use every legitimate means to promote them. The objective should be :

> a. to promote the general purposes of the Liberal party in legislation for Great Britain.
>
> b. to consider what can be done towards expediting the settlement of the Irish question by causing an early production of the Government measures for Local Government. It cannot be expected that they will satisfy the late Government, but they may be in themselves good.
>
> Together with any other points, or details, on which those who meet might think it expedient to centre.[1]

Gladstone thus was prepared to purchase reunion - even a temporary reunion - at the cost of postponing home rule for an unspecified, but presumably, a considerable length of time. In the covering letter which he sent to Granville with the memorandum he suggested Herschell, Whitbread, Hampden, and Kimberley as suitable negotiators, and on the Liberal Unionist side Derby, James, and Bright.

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1 Memorandum by Gladstone, 23 Nov. 1886, Add. Mss. 44179, f. 189.

Rosebery, he added, would have been another good choice had he been in Britain.[1] (He had gone to India).

Granville disapproved strongly of Gladstone's suggestions and replied that full powers to negotiate could not be given to the men whom Gladstone had named, and that he felt certain Derby, James, and Bright would not act meekly under instructions from Hartington and, anyhow, could not be appointed without Hartington's consent. Granville further maintained that Hartington would refuse to pledge himself to press the Government to produce measures for Ireland and that that seemed to be the only common ground if both sides were to retain their principles on home rule. A meeting might be of immense use, he admitted, if Hartington indeed wished for reunion, but it would have to be one between Hartington and Gladstone with one or two assistants on each side.[2] Gladstone protested that for him to try to bring about a meeting with Hartington would be a waste of time and would revert upon himself, but that he did not object if Granville wished to make the attempt.

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1 Gladstone to Granville, 23 Nov. 1886, P.R.O., 30.29.29A.

2 Granville to Gladstone, 26 Nov. 1886, Add. Mss. 44179, f. 191.

He did not, Gladstone added, see why he could not approach Bright, who had done no act of submission to Hartington, or James who since the election had avoided the House of Commons except when he, Gladstone, was present.[1]

Even as he was thus defending his conference suggestions Gladstone was veering away from them. On the same day he wrote both to Granville and Campbell-Bannerman that the latest news seemed to foreshadow that the Government would resort to coercion and that with such a prospect he saw no advantage in communications with the Liberal Unionists just then, but supposed that for the present the party need only rest upon its oars.[2] This mood was a temporary one. Two or three days later he appears to have been encouraging Morley to have an interview with Chamberlain[3] - a surprising move when Gladstone's recent post-election views on Chamberlain are remembered. Unfortunately there is no evidence

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1 Gladstone to Granville, 27 Nov. 1886, P.R.O., 30.29.29A.

2 Ibid.; and Gladstone to Campbell-Bannerman, 27 Nov. 1886, Add. Mss. 41215, f. 25.

3 Morley to Gladstone, 1 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44255, f. 131.

whether this interview proposal originated with Gladstone or Morley. It is certain that Morley had no liking for Gladstone's conference ideas. Gladstone, he complained to Spencer, was asking for reunion in a way which seemed dangerous and was willing to humble himself in the dust.[1] Morley seems to have considered a meeting with Chamberlain less objectionable for shortly afterwards he contacted Chamberlain's influential supporter, Rev. Dale of Birmingham, with that as his object.[2] Dale was a good choice as he was very eager to advance Liberal reunion and since the split had identified himself with neither Liberal camp.[3]

A fortnight earlier Gladstone had mentioned to Harcourt that he would like to know how the Nationalists would regard an intermediate home rule measure, good in itself although insufficient, and

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1 Spencer to Granville, 8 Dec. 1886, P.R.O., 30.29.22A.

2 Morley to Gladstone, 18, and 23 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44255, ff. 146, and 149.

3 A.W.W. Dale, Life of R.W. Dale of Birmingham, 464.

added that he himself was inclined to favour such a scheme.[1] He now returned to the idea. On 7 December Morley and Spencer had an interview with Parnell and Gladstone took the opportunity to discover his views on "a small measure as a step to his ultimate demands in order to reunite the Liberals."[2] Parnell rejected the suggestion with emphasis and said that such a course would be repudiated by the active men of his party.[3]

On the same day another event took place which had important repercussions on the question of reunion. This was the Liberal Unionist party conference which met in London. However, before dealing with it a speech which Herschell made in Bristol on 13 November has to be noted. Herschell said that he believed all Liberals were agreed that Ireland must be given a certain amount of self-government and decentralisation, and that no such concession should be of a kind which could endanger British national safety. Where Liberals

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1 Gladstone to Harcourt (draft), 16 Nov. 1886, Add. Mss. 44200, f. 178.

2 Spencer to Granville, 8 Dec. 1886, P.R.O., 30. 29.22A; and Morley to Gladstone, 7 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44255, f. 134.

3 Ibid.

unfortunately differed, he maintained, was in their opinions on the extent of the danger to Britain and the safeguards to be taken against it. Their differences, he asserted, although great, deep, and real, were ones of degree rather than of irreconcilable principles.[1] Most of the other Gladstonians appear to have considered that Herschell went too far in his eagerness to find common ground with the Liberal Unionists. Granville, for instance, described his speech as very like a surrender and assumed that Hartington would interpret it as such.[2] The Daily News, which did not give it even a proper report, commented that the speech was yet another Gladstonian declaration in favour of reunion, and that the Liberal Unionists so far had neither recognised the desirability of reunion nor responded to

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1 Bristol Mercury and Daily Post, 15 Nov. 1886. (Most newspapers either ignored or gave scrappy accounts of the speech).

2 Granville to Gladstone, 10 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44179, f. 204; and Granville to Spencer, 10 Dec. 1886, Granville vol., Althorp.

efforts to promote it.

The Liberal Unionist party conference which met on 7 December was attended by some 800 delegates and was followed by a banquet in the evening. Among those who spoke at the one or the other gathering were Hartington, Goschen, Derby, Selborne, Northbrook, Westminster, Trevelyan, Heanage (Great Grimsby), G.Dixon (Edgbaston, Birmingham), T.W.Russell (S.Tyrone), R.B.Finlay (Inverness), and Mrs. Fawcett.[1] Hartington began the proceedings by reading a letter from Bright and a telegram from Chamberlain. Bright's letter was a strong condemnation of Gladstone for continuing to ally himself with the promoters of strife and discord in Ireland, and for refusing to use his influence to restrain them. The conference, he hoped, would be large and influential and would add strength to the Government "so far as it may be our duty to support them."[2] Chamberlain's telegram, which was coolly received,[3] ran :

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1 Wife of Henry Fawcett who had died, 6 Nov. 1884.

2 Bright to Hartington, 28 Nov. 1886, Chats. 340. 2063 (The Times, 8 Dec. 1886, p. 6).

3 Annual Register, 1886, 299; Garvin, II. 272; Morley to Gladstone, 9 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44255, f. 141; British Weekly, 10 Dec. 1886, p. 3.

> Regret my absence from England prevents my attendance tomorrow. While Separatists maintain defeated programme organisation of Liberal Unionists is a necessary duty. The speech of Lord Herschell at Bristol fairly states the problem. If the Gladstonian Liberals sincerely desire reunion they should invite both sections of the party to a free conference as to the extent and character of reforms which can safely be granted to Ireland, without reference to the discarded scheme of the late Government. Our opposition is confined to the defeated policy. If that be frankly abandoned we are ready to discuss any safe scheme, but must first have assurance that the old plan, or one equally objectionable, will not again be proposed. Agreement on this cardinal point necessary preliminary to any joint action. Failing this responsibility of division rests with Separatists.[1]

Hartington in his address said that if all Gladstonians would approach Liberal reunion in the spirit of Herschell it would be as practicable as it was desirable. Gladstone, Harcourt, and Morley had not done so, he said, but had stated in their speeches that a separate Irish parliament and executive must continue to be the policy of the Liberal party, and that as a result he could not see "the slightest ground for hoping" for an understanding between the two sections. He pointed out that so far the Government had given even

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1 The Times, 8 Dec. 1886, p.6.

the most ardent radical little to complain about, and that the only complaint which he had heard of its Irish administration was that it was too lax. He advised the Government to approach local government in a wide and comprehensive spirit and approved their proposal to give similar but not identical institutions to the three countries. He condemned the Plan of Campaign and promised Liberal Unionist support in maintaining law and order in Ireland.

Next morning the unionist press expressed satisfaction with the proceedings. The Times wrote that the importance and value of the demonstration could not be over-estimated and that it was an enormous encouragement to the Cabinet at a critical moment.[1] [Critical because of the Plan of Campaign.] The Standard wrote that the proceedings had afforded the fullest and most decisive confirmation that the Government could rely absolutely on the loyalty and unswerving support of the Liberal Unionists.[2] The Daily Telegraph commented that the chief interest had been to learn whether on Liberal reunion Hartington would go to

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1 The Times, 8 Dec. 1886, p.9.

2 Standard, 8 Dec. 1886, p.4.

Hawarden or compel Hawarden to come to him, and that he and his followers had more than fulfilled the universal expectation.[1] The Birmingham Daily Post was strongly critical because the leaders had urged little except resistance to home rule and continued support of the Conservative Government.[2]

The Times considered that Chamberlain's telegram put in the claarest light the insuperable obstacles to any reconciliation with the Gladstonian section so long as it held to its characteristic doctrines.[3] The Standard noted his statement that he must first have an assurance that the old plan or one equally objectionable would not again be submitted, and confidently asserted that the Gladstonians could now give no such assurance.[4] The Daily Telegraph fixed

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1 Daily Telegraph, 8 Dec. 1886, p.5.

2 Birmingham Daily Post, 8 Dec. 1886, p.4.

3 The Times, 8 Dec. 1886, p.9.

4 Standard, 8 Dec. 1886, p.9.

on the same statement and interpreted it to mean that Chamberlain agreed with Hartington in rejecting the suggestion (which Gladstone had made a little earlier) that Gladstonians and Liberal Unionists should, as a step towards reunion, join in pressing the Government to produce their Irish measures. Liberal reunion, it added, might after a time be established by a general conference, but could not be aided by a sinking of principle in a helter-skelter rush to the Treasury bench.[1] The Birmingham Daily Post found in Chamberlain's telegram the one exception to the hopeless tone of separation and antagonism which, it declared, had characterised the conference. It expressed the hope that an earnest attempt would be made to have a reunion conference such as Chamberlain had suggested.[2]

The Gladstonians, especially those who knew how Gladstone's mind was centered on reunion, had awaited the conference with much interest as they knew that at it the Liberal Unionist leaders would have to define

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1 Daily Telegraph, 8 Dec. 1886, p.5.

2 Birmingham Daily Post, 8 Dec. 1886, p.4.

their attitude towards the other parties. Those of them who were eager for reunion were keenly disappointed and, on the whole, concluded that the only course was to bide time until perhaps a more favourable situation might develop. Even Herschell's hopes were extinguished and he too agreed that for the present nothing could be done.[1] "You praised my temper: it is a pity you did not imitate it," he told one Liberal Unionist.[2]

Hartington was unimpressed by Chamberlain's telegram. When a rumour sprang up that Gladstone was willing to accept the telegram in its entirety Hartington commented that, if true, it could be only a device for placing him in a difficulty for no agreement was likely from a conference.[3] Harcourt considered that the telegram had been nasty without being strong.[4] Spencer thought it quite offensive.[5] Morley noted that it

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1 Morley to Gladstone, 12 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44255, f.142; and Harcourt to Spencer, 16 Dec. 1886, Harcourt Vol., Althorp.

2 Morley to Gladstone, 12 Dec. 1886.

3 Hartington to Duke of Devonshire, 10 Dec. 1886, Chats. 340.2066.

4 Gardiner, II.19.

5 Spencer to Granville, 11 Dec. 1886, P.R.O., 30.29.22A.

marked off Chamberlain from Hartington and the Government, but doubted the sincerity of the reference to Herschell and a conference.[1]

Gladstone regarded the Liberal Unionist conference as being much less decisive than did most of his followers. At it the Liberal Unionists, he admitted, had been rather savage - "Chamberlain contemptuous as usual towards us and Hartington rather too like a bull in a chinn shop".[2] But he thought that the fewness of the Liberal Unionist M.P.s who had been present (some forty were present[3]) was of significance and that, since many of the Liberal Unionists were not attached to their leaders, the Gladstonians could still appeal to them either on a modus vivendi or on the duty of resisting any coercion which might be proposed without "Liberal political legislation for Ireland".[4]

Gladstone was so little deterred by the conference that on the following day he wrote to Granville and proposed that

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1 Morley to Gladstone, 9 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44255, f. 141.

2 Gladstone to Ripon (draft), 9 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44287, f. 60.

3 Programme of the Liberal Unionist conference at Willis Rooms on Tuesday, 7th December, 1886, Add. Mss. 44633, f. 160.

4 Gladstone to Ripon, 9 Dec. 1886.

Granville should write to Herschell suggesting that Herschell write to Sir Henry James inviting a conversation on the Liberal Unionist attitude to reconciliation.[1] Granville, who did not receive the letter until the 10th, replied that the only people with whom he had discussed a possible approach to the Liberal Unionists were Spencer and Wolverton, and that both thought no good could come of it. He understood that Morley thought the same. Such a move, Granville maintained, would look as though the Liberal Unionist conference and Salisbury's speech had frightened the Gladstonians. He would write to Herschell, he explained, but only if Gladstone specifically instructed him to write.[2] Gladstone answered that he would by no means press him nor would he act himself.[3] In a further letter Granville pointed out that Hartington had now gone abroad and that James would not act without him. He mentioned that he had just had a conversation with James, who had spoken with much regard for Gladstone, but had said that he thought reunion impossible for the present.[4]

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1 Gladstone to Granville, 8 Dec. 1886, P.R.O., 30.29.29 A.

2 Granville to Gladstone, 10 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44179, f.204.

3 Gladstone to Granville, 12 Dec. 1886, P.R.O., 30.29.29A.

4 Granville to Gladstone, 13 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44179, f. 211.

Gladstone's persistence in his reunion eagerness made his colleagues uneasy. Harcourt considered that Gladstone's dream of an immediate conference and reconciliation was wholly delusion for the Liberal Unionists would not have peace at any price.[1] Spencer believed that Chamberlain and Goschen and, he feared, Hartington had parted with Gladstone for good.[2] He much resented Gladstone's wish for negotiations. "Mr. G.", " he wrote to Harcourt on the 13th, "is ready to grovel in the dust to bring about reunion, either from remorse at having divided the Party or because he feels time is against him".[3] Wolverton, too, was opposed to negotiations. He was confident that any such move just then would be taken as a sign of weakness and would dishearten the party.[4] He had no hope, he stated, that "Hartington and such like" would rejoin them.[5]

On 12 December Morley had a further interview with Parnell. Afterwards he reported to Gladstone that Parnell would accept a bill limited to local government, but that he was resolutely opposed to any measure which could be mistaken for even a partial settlement of the home rule question. He would have nothing like a central council

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1 Harcourt to Granville, 14 Dec. 1886, P.R.O., 30.29.29A, and Harcourt to Spencer, 16 Dec. 1886, Harcourt vol., Althorp.

2 Spencer to Granville, 11 Dec. 1886, P.R.O., 30.29.22A.

3 Quoted, Gardiner, II. 19.

4 Wolverton to Granville, 11, and 15 Dec. 1886, P.R.O., 30.29. 22A, and 30.29.28A.

5 Wolverton to Granville, 15 Dec. 1886.

as that would be an attempted substitute for a parliament.[1]

Gladstone could now be certain that Liberal reunion on the basis of a mild measure of home rule would gain him the hostility of Parnell and his eighty-four supporters. Neither this knowledge nor the opinions of his colleagues persuaded Gladstone that an immediate attempt at reunion was altogether inadvisable. After the misfire of his suggestion that the Liberal Unionists be approached through James, he began to entertain the idea of himself making an approach by means of a public speech. He wrote asking his chief whip for his opinion on the matter. Arnold Morley replied that he had consulted John Morley and that both of them thought such a move inexpedient unless they could be certain that the Liberal Unionists would at least receive it in a friendly spirit - a possibility which John Morley doubted. John Morley, he added, would find out Chamberlain's attitude in the next two days and would write to Gladstone at once. Arnold Morley wrote that as far as he could judge the Gladstonians would be opposed to any attempt at conciliation which had the appearance of weakness or misgiving. The failure of such an attempt, he feared, would seriously damage the prestige of the party leaders, but that, on the other hand, if the move were

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1 Morley to Gladstone, 12 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44255, f. 142.

reciprocated it would give very great and general satisfaction.[1]

Next day (18 December) Morley wrote to Gladstone that on the question of communication with Chamberlain he had received a "strong and very good letter" from Rev. Dale urging the tender of an olive branch, and that he had returned a sympathetic reply. He also reported that a friend had seen Chamberlain in London and had learned that Chamberlain intended to do nothing which would endanger union among the Liberal Unionists or their alliance with the Government. Chamberlain's plan, the friend had gathered, was to prevent the Government from resorting to coercion as he believed that in that way he could keep the home rule question quiet and the Government in power for two or three years. Morley commented that this looked ill for reunion, but that he would like to see Chamberlain (if it could be brought about respectably)before feeling certain that these were his fixed intentions.[2] Next day Morley sent Dale a letter which he had reason to expect Dale would show Chamberlain

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1 A. Morley to Gladstone, 17 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44253, f. 46.

2. Morley to Gladstone, 18 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44255, f. 146.

on the following evening.[1] On the following evening Dale did not have the opportunity [2] and whether he showed it to him later cannot at present be verified. Writing to Chamberlain on 22nd, Morley assumed that he had not,[3] but one would be surprised if a reunion enthusiast like Dale had not stirred himself to the extent of passing the letter to Chamberlain in the next day or two.[4]

On the 20th Morley again wrote to Gladstone. This time he reported that a reliable person, who had had talks on the previous day with both Chamberlain and Churchill, had informed him that Churchill had been beaten in the Cabinet on the local government bill; that Chamberlain had come to London to consult with him on the matter; and that Chamberlain now said he would have to oppose the bill with all his might with the result that he would be forced away from both Hartington and the Government.[5]

Chamberlain on the 21st sent Morley a barrel of

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1 Morley to Chamberlain, 22 Dec. 1886, Garvin, II, 276.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4. In A.W.W.Dale, Life of R.W.Dale of Birmingham, the only reference to Dale's reunion activities at this time is the following : "Privately he continued his efforts to bring about a better understanding, and in December he attempted to open a way of approach between Mr. Chamberlain and the Liberal leaders. For a time there seemed to be some hope of success." (p.469).

5 Morley to Gladstone, 20 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44255, f. 148.

oysters, his customary Christmas gift,[1] and a friendly letter in which he expressed the fear that they were destined to go on for the rest of their lives disputing about the one subject on which they differed, but that he hoped there would be no permanent bitterness.[2] Chamberlain may have been influenced by information from Dale or he may have been motivated solely by regard for his old comrade, for Chamberlain had a warm, generous streak in his nature although it was not always apparent. Morley adopted the second explanation and replied in an equally friendly tone.[3] Morley informed Gladstone of the exchange, adding that Chamberlain's letter had been written "suâ sponte, and without knowing of Dale's negotiation with us",[4] but did not give the reasons which led him to that conclusion. His letter to Gladstone ended with the remark "So the way is now open, if the time should come for pourparlers."

On the same day as Morley was writing this letter to Gladstone two events occurred which transformed the whole problem of Gladstonian - Liberal Unionist relations.

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1 Garvin, II. 276.

2 Morley to Gladstone, 23 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44255, f. 149.

3 Morley to Chamberlain, 22 Dec. 1886, Garvin, II. 276.

4 Morley to Gladstone, 23 Dec. 1886.

One was Churchill's resignation from the Government and the other was an appeal by Chamberlain for Liberal reunion, which he made in a speech in Birmingham.

The sensation caused by Churchill's resignation was all the greater as it came without warning and men could only guess at the explanation. Few suspected the truth that Churchill, grown over-confident and having "forgotten Goschen", was attempting to demonstrate his indispensibility in the belief that in this way he would secure for himself an even greater influence than he already possessed. The Government was shaken to its foundations and many both at home and abroad expected it to come toppling down.[1] Hicks-Beach even advised immediate resignation unless the Liberal Unionists should consent to a coalition.[2] On the following day Salisbury wrote to Hartington who was holidaying in Italy pressing him to consent to a coalition.[3] He urged that the Conservative front bench was so weak that it must be continually in serious danger of being overthrown in "the

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1 e.g. The Manchester Guardian wrote that the Government would either have to submit to Churchill or perish, and that, as submission was difficult, practically a new government would have to be formed (24 Dec. 1886, p.5).

2 Hicks-Beach to Salisbury, 25 Dec. 1886, Lady Victoria Hicks-Beach, Life of Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, I, 301-2.

3 Salisbury to Hartington, 24 Dec. 1886, Chats. 340.2070.

chance medley" of the Commons and that, once defeated, constitutional usage would prevent Conservatives and Liberal Unionists from then coalescing. He pointed out that, "as Chamberlain had evidently made up his mind" to leave them, the exclusion of the Gladstonians would depend on the staunchness and discipline of Hartington's followers, and that there was all the difference in the world between loyalty to a minister and loyalty to the chief of an independent section. He informed Hartington that as in July he was willing to serve under him.

Hartington arrived back in London on 29 December.[1] He expected to refuse Salisbury's invitation,[2] but first set about consulting Chamberlain, Goschen, and other important Liberal Unionists.[3] Advice also came to him by post. Selborne wrote pressing an immediate coalition.[4] In his opinion the Government had no strength to spare before the resignation and he did not see how it could get through such difficulties as procedure, Irish legislation,

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1 Hartington to Duke of Devonshire, 29 Dec. 1886, Chats. 340.2077 (Holland, II. 179).

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Selborne to Hartington, 25 Dec. 1886, Chats. 340.2071.

local government, or defences if it had a weak leader in the Commons, a damaged prestige caused by disunion, and Churchill as an enemy or a "candid friend". Derby wrote that the position was similar to the one six months earlier, and that the reasons which had weighed then had lost none of their force.[1] Churchill's quarrel with his colleagues, he suggested, might have been not on whether the estimates should be raised or lowered by a million or two, but on whether they were to be framed on a war footing to enable Britain to take part in an anti-Russian alliance. They should therefore, he advised, be doubly cautious not to entangle themselves with men of whose present engagements and future intentions they could not be sure. John Bright wrote that he thought the crisis less serious than the newspapers described it and advised Hartington not to join the administration. He held that the Conservatives, even though it meant risking a general election,[2] should remain in office uhtil defeated in the Commons. He warned Hartington that were he to join the

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1 Derby to Hartington, 26 Dec. 1886, Chats. 340. 2073.

2 Bright believed that an election would result in Liberal Unionist losses (Bright to Hartington, 28 Dec. 1886, Chats. 340.2075) as also did Col. H.M.Hozier, the secretary of the Liberal Unionist Association (Col. H.M.Hozier to Hartington, 31 Dec. 1886, Chats. 340.2081).

Governmentthe Liberal Unionists who should support him would be cast off by the electors and the remainder would subside into the Gladstonian ranks.[1]

From his consultations Hartington soon learned that Liberal Unionist opinion was practically unanimous against his joining with the Conservatives in any form of composite government.[2] He himself was less convinced on the matter, but bowed to the wish of his followers. Shortly afterwards he confessed in a letter to Granville:

> . . . I wish I could feel as convinced as you are that I have done right. There seems to me to be a good many reasons why the chance of forming a tolerably strong Government by those who agree on most of the immediate and practical questions should not be sacrificed to the very doubtful prospect of my recovering any influence with the Liberal party as a whole.. . .[3]

On the last day of the year Hartington told Salisbury that he had decided with the unanimous support of his associates not to join the Government as that step must lose

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1 Bright to Hartington, 28 Dec. 1886.

2 Hartington to the Queen, 31 Dec. 1886, Holland, II. 179-81; Salisbury to the Queen [cypher telegram], 31 Dec. 1886, Letters of Queen Victoria, 3rd Series, I. 240; Hartington to Granville, 2 Jan, 1887, P.R.O., 30.29.22A (q.w.o., Holland. II. 183-4); Salisbury to Iddesleigh [cypher telegram], n.d. given by decipherer [31? Dec. 1886], Iddesleigh,421/4.

3 Hartington to Granville, 2 Jan, 1887.

him all influence over the Liberals in the country[1]. For the same reason, and also because of the strong opposition within the Conservative party, he could not, he said, accept the responsibility of himself forming a coalition unless it were to avoid a dissolution, or if the Conservatives by resignation should have admitted their inability to carry on.[2] Salisbury replied that he could not make such a confession of inability as it would be both untrue and humiliating.[3] A Conservative administration, Hartington promised, could rely on his support even should Chamberlain, whose opinions he believed to be unchanged, go over to the Gladstonians.[4]

Salisbury was not surprised[5] and, although he tried to reassure Hartington on Conservative opposition

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1 Salisbury to the Queen, 31 Dec. 1886; Hartington to the Queen, 31 Dec. 1886, and Salisbury to Iddesleigh [31? Dec. 1886].

2 Ibid.

3 Salisbury to the Queen, 31 Dec. 1886; and Salisbury to Iddesleigh [31? Dec. 1886].

4 Ibid.

5 Hartington to Duke of Devonshire, 31 Dec. 1886, Chats. 340.2080.

to a coalition,[1] he did not press him much to change his decision.[2] Instead he proposed that Goschen should be invited into the Government.[3] Hartington approved the suggestion and promised Salisbury that he would use his influence to induce Goschen to accept.[4]

Later in the same day Hartington wrote to Salisbury[5] that he had had a long conversation with Goschen in which he had urged every argument he could think of, but feared that Goschen would decide against joining. He explained that Goschen felt he would be isolated in a Conservative Cabinet and that the Conservative party had on the whole no great wish for his inclusion. On the following day Hartington had a further meeting with Goschen and learned that he had changed his mind and was willing to accept Salisbury's offer. Goschen's conditions were that he should be at liberty to state that he joined the Government as a Liberal, and that first he should have a full consultation with Salisbury on "general policy, foreign,

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1 Salisbury to the Queen, 31 Dec. 1886; and Salisbury to Iddesleigh [31? Dec. 1886].

2 Hartington to Duke of Devonshire, 31 Dec. 1886.

3 Salisbury to the Queen, 31 Dec. 1886; Hartington to Duke of Devonshire, 31 Dec. 1886; and Salisbury to Iddesleigh [31? Dec. 1886].

4 Hartington to Duke of Devonshire, 31 Dec. 1886.

5 Hartington to Salisbury, 31 Dec. 1886, Holland, II. 181-2.

domestic, legislative, and financial" as he wished to feel certain that he could act with the government on all of them.[1]

Hartington passed the news to Salisbury[2] who at once prepared to make almost any arrangement to suit Goschen. He wired to the Queen:

> . . . Lord Salisbury regards the attainment of this result [Goschen's inclusion in the Government] as a matter of enormous importance at this juncture and earnestly hopes that your Majesty will [take] the same view of the situation and will give him the necessary powers.
>
> It would be a grave national misfortune if this arrangement were to break [down] on any personal grounds.[3]

Salisbury and Goschen had an interview two days later.[4] There was no clash of views over policy, but Goschen, to Salisbury's surprise, strongly urged that Iddesleigh, who was suspected of inefficiency, should be removed from the Foreign Office.[5] Salisbury consented.[6]

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1 Hartington to Salisbury, 1 Jan. 1887, Holland, II. 182.

2 Ibid.

3 Salisbury to the Queen [cypher telegram,] 2 Jan. 1887, Letters of Queen Victoria, 3rd Series, I.247.

4 Cecil, III. 339.

5 Salisbury to Hicks-Beach, 6 Jan. 1887, Cecil, III.340.

6 Cecil, III. 340-1.

He also consented to try to meet Goschen's wish that one or two Liberal Unionist peers should join him in the Government.[1] He asked Lansdowne, who was then Governor General of Canada, and Northbrook, but both declined. Lansdowne pleaded the state of Canadian internal affairs, and that the fishery dispute with the United States was at a critical stage.[2] An additional factor in Lansdowne's decision was his ignorance on many aspects of the Government's policy and especially their Irish policy.[3] The reasons given by Northbrook for his refusal are not recorded by his biographer. Derby in a letter to Hartington wrote that he did not expect Northbrook to accept as he was independent, rather lazy, a thorough Whig and unlike Goschen, had been in the pre-home rule cabinet.[4]

The outcome was three important changes in the Cabinet: Salisbury became Foreign Secretary; Goschen undertook the Exchequer; and W.H.Smith the leadership of the House of

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1 Cecil, III. 341.

2 Salisbury to the Queen, 8 Jan. 1887, q.w.o., Letters of Queen Victoria, 3rd Series, I. 250, foot-note 2; and Lansdowne to his mother, 6 Jan. 1887, Lord Newton, Lord Lansdowne; a biography, 43-44.

3 Lansdowne to his mother, 6 Jan. 1887.

4 Derby to Hartington, 5 Jan. 1887, Chats. 340.2092.

Commons. The latter position, which Churchill had held in addition to the Exchequer, was debarred to Goschen because of his insistance on remaining a Liberal Unionist.[1]

The news that Goschen had joined the Cabinet was received by most Conservatives with relief and satisfaction. He was one of the ablest financiers in the country, an excellent debater, noted for the moderation of his views, and - most important of all - coalition was averted. The majority of the Conservative rank and file had learned of the possibility of a coalition with aversion and Hartington had been wise in taking their views into account when making his decision. Even the Cabinet had not been unanimous on the matter. Iddesleigh had been opposed to the admission into the Cabinet of any Liberal Unionist, including Goschen.[2]

The Liberal Unionists were equally glad that the situation was saved. On Goschen's transference Northbrook's opinion was representative:

> . . . Goschen has been in some respects something of a Conservative; and although his speeches were very able and courageous and much useful to the cause

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1 Cecil, III. 339.

2 Memorandum by Iddesleigh (copy), n.d., Iddesleigh, 895/4.

of the Union last year I hardly think he is a strength to the Liberal Unionists, for our Radical section is the most likely to split off, and by them I fancy Goschen has for some time been looked on as hardly a Liberal at all. . . .[1]

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1 Northbrook to Hartington, 3 Jan. 1887, Chats. 340.2086.

# CHAPTER VII

## THE ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE

The occasion of Chamberlain's reunion appeal was not an auspicious one. The Gladstonian wing had been steadily gaining influence within his Birmingham party machine and the speech was made to a special assembly of the Birmingham local associations in order to quell what threatened to be an open revolt. Chamberlain began by emphasising the importance of Churchill's resignation. He said that he feared "the old Tory influences" had gained the upper hand and that they might have to deal with a Government whose proposals no consistent Liberal would be able to support. He pointed out to the Gladstonians that the new situation provided them with a great and perhaps final opportunity for bringing about a reunion. The two sections of the Liberal party were agreed, he said, on ninety-nine points of a programme and disagreed on one only. They were, he believed, agreed upon every important point of Liberal policy for England, Scotland, and Wales. Those who had so strongly opposed the "unauthorised programme" twelve months earlier now subscribed to it. Even in Irish matters, he continued, the number of points on which they were agreed surprised him. In the first place they were agreed that there must be law and order in Ireland. They also were agreed, he said, on the importance of the Irish land problem, and to overcome any differences of opinion which there might be as to the best practical solution, he suggested a plan :

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> . . . I am convinced now that, sitting around a table and coming together in a spirit of compromise and conciliation, almost any three men, leaders of the Liberal party, although they may hold opposite views upon another branch of the question, would yet be able to arrange some scheme which would fulfil the conditions I have laid down, which would not involve unnecessary risk to the British taxpayer, and yet would make the Irish tenant owner of the land he cultivates.. . .

They were agreed, he continued, that Ireland should have local government similar to the local government which would be given to Great Britain, with alterations of detail where they might be necessary. Of purely municipal type government he was prepared, he said, to give any extension, and no one, he assured his audience, was more prepared than he to decentralise "the system of administration known as Dublin Castle". But on home rule proper he held out no hope of agreement. He urged that it be shelved completely until "all those vast changes, all those important reforms" should have been accomplished, and that not until then should Liberals think of turning to "the debatable ground upon which at present, at all events, agreement is impossible."[1]

The speech was thus not so much an appeal for a compromise as a bold invitation to the Gladstonians to come to terms with himself. Chamberlain held out no hope of any major concession on his own part. Law and order were to be maintained in Ireland which, of course, meant "coercion" if necessary, and home rule was to be shelved for an indefinite period. Once again Gladstone was asked to choose between Chamberlain and Parnell, a point which Chamberlain must have grasped for during the subsequent conference he refused,

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[1] The Times, 24 Dec. 1886.

even when in his most conciliatory mood,[1] to break off his bitter vendetta with the Nationalists.

Chamberlain had at most some twenty adherents in the House of Commons and an unsteady hold on his Birmingham party machine. Yet he invited Gladstone with his one hundred and ninety supporters to come to terms with him - and at the very moment when Radical Unionist expectations had been blighted by Churchill's resignation. Chamberlain had a better eye for political realities than most men. Part of the explanation, one feels (but through lack of available evidence cannot prove), may have been that Chamberlain had learned of Morley's approach to Dale and possibly also of Gladstone's reunion suggestions. Someone among the number who knew of Gladstone's suggestions had been gossiping for on the 24th Brett reported to Hartington that Gladstone was "burning with ardour difficult to restrain - for denunciation of the 'plan of campaign' and for a 'conference' with the Unionists." [2] Pointing to the same conclusion is the rumour, which sprang up after the Liberal Unionist conference, that Gladstone was fully willing to adopt the proposals of Chamberlain's telegram.[3]

One result of the circumstances under which the speech was made was that the majority of people, and especially Gladstonians and Nationalists, refused to give it a literal interpretation. They assumed that Chamberlain, with no prospect before him but of

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1 e.g. Chamberlain's Hawick speech, 22 Jan. 1887, The Times, 24 Jan. 1886.

2 Brett to Hartington, 24 Dec. 1886, Chats. 340.2068.

3 See above p. 303.

years in the wilderness in the company of Whigs and Tories, was manoeuvring for an opportunity to rejoin Gladstone. Some were not satisfied by so simple an explanation, but suspected that he and Churchill were in league,[1] or that he was endeavouring to prevent Hartington from joining the Conservatives in a reconstructed ministry,[2] or that perhaps he was trying to demonstrate to the rank and file that Gladstone was the big obstacle to reunion, and he its champion.[3] The more responsible newspapers on the whole were cautious in their immediate reaction, few committing themselves to more than tentative remarks and speculations. Nevertheless, in almost all the press comments it is clear that the question in the mind of the commentator was, Is Chamberlain going to return to Gladstone? and that with very few of them was it, Will Gladstone come to terms with Chamberlain? Individuals were more positive in their expressions of opinion. "Chamberlain has evidently made up his mind to leave us," wrote Salisbury.[4] Gladstone's conclusion was "We stand midway in his estimation between the Government plus Churchill and the Government minus Churchill.[5] Courtney remarked to his wife, "Everyone says Mr. Chamberlain <u>can't</u> give way to Mr. Gladstone, but no one says he <u>won't</u>."[6]

Gladstone's conclusion expressed, not only the general opinion

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1 <u>e.g.</u> Spencer to Gladstone, 26 Dec. 1886, P.R.O. 30.29.22A; or Wolverton to Gladstone, 26 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44349, f.221; or <u>Manchester Guardian</u>, 24 Dec. 1886, p.5.

2 <u>e.g.</u> H.A.Lascelles to Hartington, 24 Dec. 1886, Chats. 340.2069.

3 <u>e.g.</u> Kate Courtney's diary, 24 Dec. 1886, Courtney, XXIII.

4 Salisbury to Hartington, 24 Dec. 1886, Chats. 340.2070.

5 Gladstone to Harcourt (draft), 30 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss 44200, f. 222.

6 Kate Courtney's diary, [early Jan. 1887], Courtney XXIII.

of the time, but the one which was to become so thoroughly established that to this day the current assumption is that Chamberlain's speech and the subsequent Round Table Conference had their genesis in Churchill's resignation.[1] Even J. L. Garvin in his life of Chamberlain does not go much beyond it, but works on the hypothesis that Chamberlain was motivated almost completely by the belief that no longer could he expect reform from the Conservatives.[2] Such explanations are over-simple and take no account of a number of factors.

Undoubtedly Chamberlain was startled, and assumed that Churchill had been forced to resign by the determination of his colleagues to keep liberal legislation to a minimum,[3] and he made his speech in that belief. But Chamberlain's telegram to the Liberal Unionist conference on 7 December proves that his reunion appeal was more than a "spur of the moment" performance.[4] The abrupt, dictatorial tone of the telegram contrasts sharply with the plausibility of the speech, but when the speech is reduced to bare essentials there can be no mistaking that the one was the prototype of the other. Chamberlain himself referred to the speech as an extension of the telegram.[5] The main difference between the two

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1 e.g. R.C.K.Ensor, England 1870-1914, 175; and J.L.Hammond, Gladstone and the Irish nation, 566.

2 Garvin, II. Chap. XXXIV, passim; and ibid., II. 434.

3 Chamberlain's speech, 23 Dec. 1886, The Times, 24 Dec. 1886. Chamberlain wrote to Brett (23 Dec. 1886), "What do you think of the little rift now? Salisbury is a bold man and is no doubt prepared for all the consequences." (Journals and letters of Reginald Viscount Esher, I. 129).

4 For text of telegram see above p. 299.

5 Chamberlain to Churchill, 3 Jan. 1887, Churchill, II. 267-8.

was that in the telegram the Gladstonians were asked to abandon completely any attempt at establishing an Irish legislative of the kind envisaged in the defeated Government of Ireland Bill, while in the speech they were asked to postpone such an attempt indefinitely. On both occasions Chamberlain suggested that, as a preliminary to reunion, agreement on a common Irish policy should be secured between Gladstonians and Liberal Unionists by means of a conference.

The Government's reluctance to press matters likely to arouse strong opposition within the Conservative party undoubtedly weighed heavily with Chamberlain. Nevertheless, he still had as good, or perhaps better, reasons for expecting reforms after the fall of Churchill than he had in the preceding August when, as has been seen, he appears to have been as much interested in avoiding controversial legislation as he was in securing the adoption of a reform programme. Salisbury and other important members of the Government were publicly committed to much of the "Dartford Programme." In addition, a government which relied for its existence on the support of Liberals, and had both Chamberlain and Churchill as independent critics, could not avoid making itself responsible for some reform. What Chamberlain could no longer confidently expect were the radical reforms, which, under the influence of Churchill, he seems to have been in high hopes of when he left England in October.

Chamberlain, after the general election, had been guided by the expectation of a Liberal reunion when Gladstone should disappear from politics and held that, in the meantime, nothing should be done either to widen the gap with the Gladstonians or to overthrow the

Government. However, during the weeks which followed, the difficulties of serving both Liberal unity and Government safety were demonstrated to him in a practical manner and he must have seen that, in spite of his desire to achieve the contrary, Liberal Unionists and Gladstonians were steadily drawing further apart, and that each clash between the two nailed the home rule flag the more firmly to the Gladstonian mast. Then, too, Chamberlain was a restless and ambitious man and when, in mid-summer, he decided on a waiting policy he chose the one to which temperamentally he was least suited. When the tide of events started to run against him, one feels that it was only a matter of time until his combative instinct would lead him into launching some active scheme.

If only as a deterrent against the temptation to assume that Chamberlain made his reunion appeal in total ignorance of the true state of affairs within the Cabinet, it is worth noting that Chamberlain had fuller information on what had been taking place in the Cabinet than almost anyone outside it. Since his return to Britain (12 December) Churchill and he had been in close consultation[1 & 2] and from him he knew that, until at least three days beforehand, the controversial question had been whether to include

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1 Churchill to Chamberlain, 19 Dec. 1886, Garvin, II. 272-3; Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 233; and Brett's journal, 25 Dec. 1886, Journals and letters of Reginald Viscount Esher, I. 131.

2 A common tactic with Churchill was to endeavour to obtain his own way by pointing out to his colleagues that his views were also those of Chamberlain and by reminding them of the danger that Chamberlain might rejoin Gladstone should he be dissatisfied with the Government's measures. (e.g. see Churchill to Chamberlain, 19 Dec. 1886). The tactic was little liked by Salisbury. Shortly after the resignation Salisbury wrote to a friend that Churchill had been especially difficult to work with because of his resolution to make the interests of the budget overrule the wishes and necessities of the other departments, and because of his friendship with Chamberlain "which made him insist that we should accept that statesman as our guide in internal politics." (Salisbury to Sir James Fitzjames Stephen, 30 Dec. 1886, Cecil, III. 336-7).

in the local government bill the ex officio representation pressed for by many Conservatives and such men as Goschen.[1] The local government bill, however, was the one question on which Chamberlain was intensely anxious that Churchill should have his way, and the one on which Chamberlain was most likely to go to extremes.[2] On foreign policy, and such coercion as might be necessary he was prepared, he had said, to give "a generous consideration."[3]

Two letters which Chamberlain wrote to Churchill on 23 and 26 December throw interesting light on his attitude just then. They show that he had no more than a slight hope that anything important would come of his Birmingham speech. Neither letter contains any indication that Chamberlain was wallowing in the slough of despond, as has so often been assumed, but on the contrary and especially in the second, there is a sturdy note of optimism and the old unyielding determination.

> . . . I have to speak tonight, he wrote on the 23rd and must express my first thoughts on what is an entirely changed situation.
>
> I wish I was able to communicate with you beforehand, but if you have any wishes or ideas let me know. If necessary we will arrange a meeting, and I will run up to London again.
>
> The Government is doomed, and I suspect we may have to reform parties on a new basis.[4] You and I

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1 Churchill to Chamberlain, 19 Dec. 1886; and Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 233.

2 Ibid., Chamberlain to Lord Rothschild, [19 or 20] Dec. 1886, referred to, Garvin, II. 273; Brett to Hartington, 24 Dec. 1886, Chats. 340.2068; and Dilke's memoir, Gwynn and Tuckwell, II. 265.

3 Churchill to Chamberlain, 19 Dec. 1886.

4 This sentence, on a first glance, makes one suspect that Chamberlain was thinking of Liberal reunion, but when it is taken in conjunction with the letter of three days later it seems more probable that he had in mind a coalition government and an independent alliance between Churchill and him.

are equally adrift from the old organisations.[1]

In the second letter he wrote:

> . . . You will have a hard time to go through. Your case will be mine almost exactly, and I can tell you it is a bitter pilgrimage which is in prospect. The party tie is the strongest sentiment in this country - stronger than patriotism or even self-interest. But it will all come right in the end for both of us.
>
> I assume that you will maintain an independent position, and in that case you will be a power that your party cannot ignore. The Standard has a right to be angry, and the Caucuses will denounce you; but in their hearts they know you are indispensable, and when they find they cannot bully you into submission they will come to your terms. Next time, however, that either you or I join a Cabinet we must be certain of our majority in it.
>
> My speech has fluttered the dovecotes tremendously, and my correspondence shows that many of the Gladstonians are very uncomfortable and anxious to come to terms. But I do not believe that there will be any practical result. Mr. Gladstone does not give way on the main point - neither will I . . .[2]

Gladstone thought that the natural sequel to Churchill's resignation was a Conservative - Liberal Unionist coalition.[3] He assumed that Churchill could not go back and that an attempt to fill his place with Goschen would be on the level of Bright's pills for an earthquake.[4] He thought the situation should be judged primarily for its effect on the Irish question and was tempted to hope that Hartington would join the Government as that would clear the ground.[5] He rejoiced to think, he remarked to

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1 Chamberlain to Churchill, 23 Dec. 1886, Churchill, II. 252.

2 Chamberlain to Churchill, 26 Dec. 1886, ibid., II. 252-3.

3 Gladstone to Granville, 23 Dec. 1886, P.R.O., 30.29.29A; and Gladstone to Morley (draft), 25 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44255, f. 154. (q.w.o., Morley, III. 364-6).

4 Ibid.

5 Gladstone to Morley, 25 Dec. 1886.

Morley, that, come what might, the resignation would advance the Irish question.[1] Gladstone's desire for an immediate approach to the Liberal Unionists vanished. Chamberlain's speech, he admitted, was a new fact of great weight, but added that he thought the momen for taking account of it had not yet come.[2]

Morley considered Chamberlain's speech second in importance only to Churchill's resignation.[3] He pointed out that, although Chamberlain had not committed himself to any definite advance from his position of the previous January, his tone was now very different.[4] "If he can be got to advance, and if P[arnell] were moderate in the sense of his last conversation with me, there might be some chance of daylight," Morley wrote to Gladstone.[4] He added that he did not wish to act as an intermediary with Chamberlain, but would accept as a duty whatever Gladstone should think desirable.[6] Nevertheless, like so many other Gladstonians, Morley suspected Chamberlain's motives. Was he simply foxing? he wondered.[7] Morley believed that bitter disruption would follow in both unionist camps should Hartington join Salisbury in a government, and that home rule would reap the benefit.[8]

Spencer feared that Chamberlain's speech would have clinched

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1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 Morley to Gladstone, 24 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44255, f. 152.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Morley to Harcourt, 24 Dec. 1886, referred to, Gardiner, II. 19.

8 Morley to Gladstone, 27 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44255, f. 158; and Morley to Spencer, 27 Dec. 1886, Morley vol., Althorp.

Gladstone's desire for overtures and was much relieved to learn that Gladstone was not disposed "to dash into negotiations" with Chamberlain.[1] Spencer denounced Chamberlain as being purely an opportunist,[2] and was uncertain whether he was seeking reconciliation with the Gladstonians or was preparing to make a final break with them, preparatory to joining Churchill in the formation of a new party.[3] Spencer admitted that he wished the land question could be settled apart from home rule, but saw no prospect of such an arrangement as the Parnellites would be opposed to it.[4]

Granville agreed with Gladstone that Churchill's resignation much strengthened the home rule cause.[5] On Chamberlain's speech his only available remark is that Chamberlain was the prince of opportunists, but that his help would be very important.[6] Ripon stated that he would be glad to see Chamberlain reunited with the party, but not at the cost of any sacrifice of principle.[7] Wolverton feared that Churchill and Chamberlain were acting together.[8] Arnold Morley remarked that, although Chamberlain's

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1 Spencer to Granville, 27 Dec. 1886, P.R.O. 30.29.22A.

2 Ibid.

3 Spencer to Granville, 26 Dec. 1886, P.R.O. 30.29.22A.

4 Ibid.

5 Granville to Gladstone, 24, and 25 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44179, ff. 222, and 228; Granville to Spencer, 24 Dec. 1886, Granville vol., Althorp.

6 Granville to Gladstone, 30 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44179, f. 234.

7 Ripon to Gladstone, 29 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44287, f. 67.

8 Wolverton to Gladstone, 26 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44349, f. 221.

speech contained very little concession, it was all which could be expected under the circumstances.[1] He suspected that it resulted from the considerable pressure which he understood "Dale, Harris & Co" were applying to Chamberlain to get him to take a conciliatory attitude.[2]

Chamberlain's reunion appeal aroused greater enthusiasm in Harcourt than in any other Gladstonian. On reading the speech he wrote by the next post[3] assuring Chamberlain that he earnestly desired to co-operate in anything tending towards party reunion and offered to go up to London to meet him should he think a meeting of use.[4] Next day he wrote to Gladstone that Chamberlain's speech, together with private indications, caused him to believe that Chamberlain was holding out the olive branch and that he felt very strongly that the Gladstonians should go halfway to meet him. The occasion, Harcourt asserted, invited an attempt at reunion which if let slip might not recur. He stated that he might see Chamberlain soon and asked permission to tell him that the Gladstonians recognised and welcomed his spirit of reconciliation.[5]

Harcourt considered Churchill's resignation the most extraordinary event since the break up of the Rockingham ministry

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1 A. Morley to Gladstone, 24 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44253, f. 50.

2 Ibid.

3 Harcourt to Chamberlain, 24 Dec. 1886, q.w.o., Garvin, II. 280-1.

4 Ibid.

5 Harcourt to Gladstone, 25 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44200, f. 195.

and believed that its consequences might be as important.[1] He was confident that the Government must "go smash,"[2] and that neither Hartington nor Goschen would join it.[3] But for the persistence, the good will, and the active measures of Harcourt the Round Table Conference might never have materialised, or if it had, would have collapsed quickly. "Let us go in hot and strong for compromise and not mince matters too much if the thing can be done," he wrote to Morley.[4] Harcourt it was who obtained Gladstone's luke-warm consent to the experiment.

Chamberlain did not rush forward with the enthusiasm of Harcourt. As Garvin pointed out, "Chamberlain, at the outset of this dubious affair, was a blend of adventurous optimism and instinctive precaution."[5] A mistaken impression as to the cause of Churchill's resignation may have influenced Chamberlain's speech of 23 December, but it was not a factor which influenced his decision to take part in a conference. Not later than the 26th Chamberlain learnt much of the real story of the resignation from Churchill and was by no means impressed by the reasons which he gave for his action.[6]

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1 Harcourt to Gladstone, 25 Dec. 1886.

2 Ibid.

3 Harcourt to Gladstone, 26 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44200, f. 199 (q.w.o., Gardiner, II. 20).

4 Harcourt to Morley, 26 Dec. 1886, quotation, Gardiner, II. 20.

5 Garvin, II. 283.

6 Chamberlain to Churchill, 26 Dec. 1886, Churchill, II. 252-3.

Chamberlain replied thus to Harcourt's offer of co-operation :

> . . . The land question in Ireland is the most urgent, whether you have regard to social order or to the Parliamentary position. If we were all agreed upon a strong land bill, the Irish members must support it. Their constituents would stand no nonsense on this point and would not allow the question to be post-poned for Home Rule or anything else.
>
> When I spoke of "3 Liberals around a table" I thought of you, Herschell and Fowler, as the three conspicuous Gladstonians who have done nothing to embitter the differences which have arisen and have shown moderation and fairness throughout. To such a Committee I would gladly submit in detail various suggestions for dealing with the land question. I should have confidence that you at least would not use these confidential proposals in subsequent public discussion . . .
>
> The Committee would also of course be in possession of the views of Mr. Gladstone and of any other leader who has given study to the subject.. . . I imagine they would find it necessary to formulate some scheme of local or municipal government and . . . I do not anticipate that there could be any serious difficulty in arriving at a common conclusion.
>
> If the Committee were successful thus far, I for one should begin to entertain hopes of further agree-ment. At the present time there appears to be a car-dinal difference of opinion between Mr. Gladstone and the Liberal Unionist leaders on the subject of an Irish Parliament.
>
> I cannot pretend to see my way as yet out of this difficulty but time and full discussion may work miracles.
>
> . . . I do not contemplate complete personal reunion as the result of any conference or mediation. I have been most bitterly wounded by the injustice and the ingratitude of former associates and I feel that, for me at any rate, a temporary effacement is a necessary prelude to any future usefulness. But I am sincerely impressed with the danger to Liberalism, to all for which I have struggled and laboured - if present dissentions are allowed to continue.
>
> Hitherto I have done nothing - or very little - to organise opposition to Mr. Gladstone's proposals;

> but this must come and when a Liberal or Radical Unionist Committee is established in every constituency, the Tories will have an easy time of it, and all that I care for in politics will be indefinitely postponed . . . [1]

Chamberlain thus still wished to exclude home rule from any immediate reunion discussion, and in Harcourt, Herschell, and Fowler he chose three Gladstonians, who not only were very eager for his return to their ranks, but had almost as little liking as he for home rule as planned in the Government of Ireland Bill. Had his proposal been accepted the chances of an agreement would have been excellent - at least within the conference.

Gladstone answered Harcourt's letter on the 27th. He agreed that Chamberlain's speech was an important event of which account had to be taken. He even thought it should lead to a modus vivendi. But he himself, he stated, could make no binding declaration until he should know the composition of the new government, and be able to make a reasonable forecast of its policy. The importance of Chamberlain's speech, he observed, lay more in its unwonted moderate temper than in the plan "which with characteristic facility and rapidity" Chamberlain had laid down. He thought that a modus vivendi did not lie in a land bill and the proclaimed postponement by the Gladstonians of home rule (a course which he declared Chamberlain should have seen from the beginning was impossible). It lay "rather in ascertaining whether if Home Rule cannot be had at once, there can be had a measure worth Ireland's taking in the province of Local Government with the assent of 1. the Liberals, 2. the Nationalists, 3. the

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1 Chamberlain to Harcourt, 26 Dec. 1886, Chamberlain, 235-7.

Dissentient Liberals, either the whole or a section of them." Already Gladstone was uneasy at Harcourt's pro-Chamberlain enthusiasm and by his evident inclination to appoint himself as intermediary. Chamberlain, he pointed out, although he had great power of opposing and damaging in debate had no large following to offer, nor one in which the quality would compensate for the quantity. He tactfully hinted that, should an intermediary be required, Morley, who, he explained, was already in the process of approaching Chamberlain, was the man for the task.[1]

But Harcourt was in no mood for taking hints from anyone. On receiving Chamberlain's letter he had at once gone up to London and, after discussing the matter with Morley, had sent a message asking Chamberlain to come on the following day to London for a discussion.[2] Chamberlain telegraphed that he would come.[3] Harcourt in reporting Chamberlain's reply wrote to Gladstone that he quite agreed that Chamberlain's speech would not serve as the basis of a modus vivendi, but that, if the spirit of reconciliation should be present, he believed the other matters would prove elastic.[4]

These developments were far from reassuring to Gladstone who complained to Granville that Harcourt was inclined to travel a little too fast, and that he wished Granville had been at his elbow. He considered Morley, he wrote, "to be very solid 'on his

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1 Gladstone to Harcourt (draft), 27 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44200, f. 207.

2 Harcourt to Gladstone, 28 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44200, f. 209.

3 Harcourt to Gladstone, 29 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44200, f. 214.

4 Gladstone to Granville, 30 Dec. 1886, P.R.O., 30.29.29A.

pins' and sure to keep straight." He added that receptivity, tranquility, patience and caution, seemed to him the prescription for the moment.[1]

Chamberlain can have had little hope of Hartington joining the proposed discussions when even the optimistic Harcourt had none.[2] Nevertheless, and perhaps mainly in order to safeguard his alliance with him, Chamberlain had an interview with Hartington on 29 December and again on 2 January at which he attempted to persuade him to join.[3] Hartington had no liking for the suggestion and warned Chamberlain that he was placing himself in a risky position.[4] But Hartington did admit that he was still prepared to go as far towards a central Irish body as he had gone in his election address of July.[5]

Harcourt and Chamberlain met at Harcourt's London home on 30 December. Chamberlain wanted the proposed conference to be confined at the outset to an attempt to discover a mutually acceptable policy for Irish land and local government, and to

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1 Ibid.

2 Harcourt to Gladstone, 30 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44200, f. 225 (q.w.o., Gardiner, II. 23).

3 Chamberlain to Harcourt, 29 Dec. 1886, and 2 Jan. 1887, Garvin, II. 282; Chamberlain to Hartington, 2 Jan. 1887, Chats. 340.2084A; Lord Harcourt's journal, 31 Dec. 1886, Gardiner, II. 23-24; Morley to Granville, 1 Jan. 1887, P.R.O., 30.29.22A; Morley to Gladstone, 1 Jan. 1887, Add. Mss. 44255, f. 169; and Morley to Spencer, 1 Jan. 1887, Morley vol., Althorp.

4 Ibid.

5 Morley to Gladstone, 1 Jan. 1887.

include home rule on the agenda only if they should succeed in their first aim.[1] The great difference between Gladstone and himself, Chamberlain said, was that Gladstone treated Ireland as a separate nation, while he regarded it as a state or province of Britain in the same way as Nova Scotia was a province of Canada.[2] He stated that he had little hope of this difference of attitude being surmounted, and that he was unwilling to enter the conference if home rule were to be the first topic.[3] Harcourt objected strongly that to postpone the question of home rule would give the impression that the Gladstonians were willing to abandon their principle of an Irish legislature for Irish affairs.[4] At last Chamberlain for practical purposes yielded and agreed that the conference should from the beginning discuss the problem of home rule "if thought desirable."[5] They agreed that Morley should be proposed as a representative in addition to the men whom Chamberlain had originally suggested.[6] Chamberlain, knowing that

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1 Harcourt to Gladstone, 30 Dec. 1886; Harcourt to Spencer, 1 Jan. 1887, Harcourt vol., Althorp; Chamberlain's memorandum, 30 Dec. 1886, Chamberlain, 237-8; and Harcourt's speech, 27 Feb. 1889, The Times, 28 Feb. 1889, p.6.

2 Chamberlain's memorandum, 30 Dec. 1886.

3 Ibid.

4 Harcourt to Gladstone, 30 Dec. 1886.

5 Ibid., Harcourt to Spencer, 1 Jan. 1887; and Chamberlain's memorandum, 31 Dec. 1886, Chamberlain, 239-40.

6 Ibid.

he could rely on his sympathy,[1] was eager to retain Fowler and urged the desirability of having him as a financial expert on the land question.[2] The suggestion that Trevelyan should be invited to take part seems to have been discussed also.[3]

Next day the two met again and after an hour's discussion Harcourt suggested that they send for Morley. Chamberlain "hummed and hawed," but as he produced no good reason Harcourt went out and reappeared with Morley.[4] Both Harcourt and Morley pressed for the inclusion of one or two Liberal Unionists and suggested Trevelyan.[5] Chamberlain reluctantly consented.[6] He thought it better, he said, to bring them in later when perhaps a measure of agreement had been secured.[7] Should the conference fail, both sides, it was agreed, would be at liberty to resume their original positions without having been in any way compromised.[8] Subject to Gladstone's approval, the first session was fixed for 13 and 14

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1 H. Fowler (Wolverhampton) had in the past shown a sympathetic moderation when speaking of Liberal Unionists; on the previous day (29 Dec. 1886) he had in a public speech welcomed Chamberlain's "olive branch" and in private he was doing his best to make reconciliation possible. See E. H. Fowler, Life of Lord Wolverhampton, Chap. XIII.

2 Harcourt to Gladstone, 30 Dec. 1886.

3 Chamberlain's memorandum, 30 Dec. 1886.

4 Lord Harcourt's journal, 31 Dec. 1886, Gardiner, II. 23-24.

5 Harcourt to Gladstone, 31 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44200, f. 230; and Lord Harcourt's journal, 31 Dec. 1886.

6 Ibid.

7 Lord Harcourt's journal, 31 Dec. 1886.

8 Chamberlain's memorandum, 31 Dec. 1886, Chamberlain, 239-40.

January.[1] A few days later it was finally settled that Trevelyan should join the conference in place of H. Fowler,[2] whom the Gladstonians ruled out because of his suspected pro-Chamberlainism,[3] and that the other members should be those already suggested ; Chamberlain, Harcourt, Morley, and Herschell.

Chamberlain's reluctance to have Liberal Unionists other than himself at the conference is at first a little surprising. But Chamberlain's attitude is understandable. He could be certain that, as long as Hartington held aloof from the conference, no Liberal Unionist other than a radical would consent to take part, and the radicals, except for Trevelyan, contained no one of much standing. To have suggested Powell Williams, or Jesse Collings, or W. S. Caine would have merely emphasised, or even exaggerated, how utterly Chamberlain stood alone. Trevelyan, the one possibility, Chamberlain held in low esteem.[4] Also, he may have been uneasy lest Trevelyan should follow a line of his own in the conference.[5]

On both days of his discussion with Chamberlain Harcourt sent Gladstone a full account of what had passed. In concluding his second letter he declared that they should now strike while the

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1 Lord Harcourt's journal, 31 Dec. 1886.

2 Gardiner, II. 26-27.

3 A. Morley to Gladstone, 31 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44253, f. 52; Spencer to Gladstone, 20 Jan. 1887, Add. Mss. 44313, f. 110; Spencer to Granville, 20 Jan. 1887, P.R.O., 30.29.22A; Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 242; and Garvin, II. 283.

4 Granville to Harcourt (draft), 2 Jan. 1887, P.R.O., 30.29.28A; and is shown by Chamberlain's conduct towards him during the conference.

5 Trevelyan had not joined the National Liberal Union and had always declined to use the term Liberal Unionist when referring to himself. ( Trevelyan's speech, Glasgow, 25 July 1887, The Times, 26 July 1887, p.8 ).

iron was hot and pressed Gladstone to write him a letter for publication approving of the conference suggestion. Such an approval, he urged, was essential in order that the conference might have sufficient authority as only Gladstone's word would carry weight with his party and the Parnellites.[1] Harcourt was aware of Gladstone's hostility to negotiations between him and Chamberlain, and so to reinforce his plea for Gladstone's public approval he wrote on the following day to Granville and to Spencer asking them to use their influence with Gladstone.[2] If they did not do so the whole affair, he warned them, would collapse and he at least would have nothing further to do with it.[3]

Harcourt's appeal to Granville and Spencer was needless for on 3 January he received from Gladstone a letter for publication such as he had asked for. Gladstone enclosed with it the following important statement:

> . . . By a modus vivendi I understand a partial agreement, without prejudice to what lies beyond it, supplying a plan of present action, and prompted by a desire that a wider accommodation may in due season be found practicable.
>
> I consider that in a conference of this nature opinions given on one point may naturally depend on what is thought as to some other point, and that all who take part are at liberty to resume their previous attitudes, unless in so far as they may arrive at any understanding otherwise.

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1 Harcourt to Gladstone, 31 Dec. 1886, Add. Mss. 44200, f. 230.

2 Harcourt to Granville, 1 Jan. 1887, P.R.O., 30.29.29A; and Harcourt to Spencer, 1 Jan. 1887, Harcourt vol., Althorp.

3 Ibid.

I assume it to be impossible for Mr. Chamberlain as it evidently is for us to recede from the main contention or to do anything in disparagement of it. But it stands to be considered.

1. What we can arrange in the way of common action.

2. How we can handle our differences, or how far we can reserve them, so as not to bring about contention.

Individually I do not at this moment see my way as to the construction of a new Land Purchase Bill . . . If however others find the ground more open than I do, by no means let me stand in the way of their deliberations.

As to 2. I put aside all idea of a serious effort to press a plan of Home Rule on our basis under the present circumstances, but leave open the question whether there should or should not be a vote in its favour, which it would be difficult to decide at the present moment.

As to 1. The possible basis for common action seems to me to be :

(a) Some Bill on the lines of a Liberal Local Government for Ireland.. . .

(b) Bills of Liberal policy, on points accepted by the whole party. Or motions deemed politic, e.g. public expenditure, if so deemed.

(c) Procedure : to press our own opinions in the sense (a) of more Devolution (b) of clôture by majority.. . .

While well disposed to any really useful measure, and strongly impressed with the necessity of avoiding anything equivocal in our general position, I am more anxious for harmony than for activity.. . .[1]

Chamberlain's attitude to the conference is indicated in two letters which he wrote on 4 and 6 January again urging

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1 Gladstone to Harcourt (draft), 1 Jan. 1887, Add. Mss. 44201, f.3.

Hartington to take part.

> . . . By modus vivendi, he wrote on the 4th, we understand the possibility of partial agreement without prejudice to anything further and with both parties at full liberty to resume at any time their original attitude. Nothing will induce me to consent to a Parliament in Dublin with an executive dependant on it. On the other hand, Mr. G[ladstone]can hardly be expected to proclaim that he has entirely abandoned what he has declared to be a cardinal principle. But the Conference will show : 1st, whether we can agree on other branches of the Irish question, viz. the land and local government; 2nd, whether there is any 'tertium quid' - any alternative on which we can also agree as good in itself without requiring from either side any formal repudiation of previously expressed opinions.[1]

In the second letter he wrote :

> . . . I do not fear that any conference will alter the opinion I have publicly expressed.
>
> I can hardly expect that Mr. Gladstone will surrender his opinions either, but it is possible, that admitting his inability to give effect to them now, he may be ready to lay them aside either absolutely or in favour of some substitution which discussion may suggest.
>
> I think, as I always have done, that land ought to be dealt with first - that there is a possibility of agreement on this branch of the question, - and that if it were once settled the Home Rule agitation would be reduced to manageable proportions.. . .[2]

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1 Chamberlain to Hartington, 4 Jan. 1887, Chats. 340.2090, (Chamberlain, 243-4, q.w.o., Garvin, II. 284, and Holland, II. 185).

2 Chamberlain to Hartington, 6 Jan. 1887, Chats. 340.2095 (Chamberlain, 244-6).

If Chamberlain had seen a letter which Gladstone wrote to Harcourt on the following day he would have been even less optimistic of a successful outcome for the conference.

> . . . In your conversation, you <u>three</u> will represent in one sense 280, and in a fuller sense say 195 votes. They <u>two</u> will represent six or eight ? The 195 with firm ground under their feet; the six or eight (if there be so many) floating in the air.. . .
>
> Should you want another hand, you might think of Sir C. Russell.. . . Chamberlain is under a great necessity of moving. We are not! All our necessity is to avoid a reasonably founded charge of overlooking a pacific overture which might have been accepted without compromise of our policy.. . .[1]

Gladstone's attitude had thus very much hardened during the preceding week and perhaps as significant as anything was his suggestion of the staunchly Gladstonian Sir Charles Russell as a delegate. The fear that Harcourt and Herschell were pro-Chamberlain, the conviction that by itself the course of events - especially coercive actions by the Government - would go far towards winning the struggle for home rule,[2] further reflection on the smallness of Chamberlain's following - six or eight of them he reckoned -, pressure from the radical and other Gladstonians opposed to a conference,[3] and fear of estranging Parnell[4] were

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1 Gladstone to Harcourt (draft), 8 Jan. 1887, Add. Mss. 44201, f. 21.

2 When writing to Harcourt about the conference on 3 Feb. Gladstone remarked, "My feeling has always been that the battle was for the present largely out of our hands, but that it would be fought <u>for us</u> partly by experience of Ireland and partly by the proposals and errors of the Government." (quoted, Gardiner, II. 31).

3 In his letter to Harcourt (8 Jan.) Gladstone stated that the greater part of his correspondence expressed "jealousy against undue concessions."

4 In his letter to Harcourt (8 Jan.) Gladstone wrote, "I take it we shall not lightly do anything to split away from them [the Nationalists] on the main Irish issue." Earlier in a letter to Morley he had assured Parnell that he had no cause for alarm (3 Jan. 1887, Add. Mss. 44255, f. 175).

probably all factors contributing to Gladstone's new attitude.

Although Hartington thought the Gladstonians had more to fear from the conference than had the Liberal Unionists, [1] he did not expect that it would serve any useful purpose and steadily refused to participate. Even had he wished to do so, he could hardly have participated after the part which he had taken in the events which culminated in Goschen joining the Government. Hartington, although he had not been consulted before the Birmingham speech, bore no malice and seemed to act on the principle that it was best to allow Chamberlain to take his own course and to hope that he would come back a sadder and wiser Liberal Unionist. On 9 January Hartington wrote to Buckle, the editor of The Times, stating his own position and suggested that The Times should take as friendly a line towards Chamberlain as it could. He pointed out that as far as he knew Chamberlain had said nothing which showed any inclination to recede from his previous position on the question of an Irish parliament and executive. [2] Buckle replied that anything which The Times could do to keep Chamberlain to his guns would be done.[3]

When Harcourt had been carrying out the preliminary negotiations for the conference Morley had persistently warned him to be less trustful of Chamberlain. [4] However, the meeting

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1 Hartington to Buckle (draft), 9 Jan. 1887, Chats. 340.2099.

2 Hartington to Buckle (draft), 9 Jan. 1887, Chats. 340.2099.

3 Buckle to Hartington, 10 Jan. 1887, Chats. 340.2100.

4 Gardiner, II. 19-27.

with Chamberlain on the 31st assured Morley - at least-temporarily - that Chamberlain was acting in good faith and with a real desire for reconciliation.[1] Morley did not expect the conference to result in a modus vivendi, but thought that it might "soften things" and at worst could do no harm.[2] He suspected Harcourt and Herschell of being willing to sacrifice the party's home rule principles to secure Chamberlain's return.[3]

Granville was even less optimistic than Morley about the outcome of the conference. At best he hoped for a friendly parting.[4] Success, he observed seemed impossible, but if obtained would be excellent.[5] He believed that Herschell was not firm on home rule and that Harcourt could not be relied upon, but he had, he declared, much confidence in Morley.[6] The fatal

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1 Morley to Gladstone, 31 Dec, 1886. Add. Mss. 44255, f. 165.

2 Morley to Granville, 1 Jan. 1887, P.R.O., 30.29.22A.

3 Writing of the Round Table Conference in his life of Gladstone, Morley stated, "Sir William Harcourt . . . thought the break up of a great political combination to be so immense an evil, as to call for almost any sacrifice to prevent it." (vol III. 364). He described as a farce Chamberlain's original suggestion that the delegates should be Harcourt, Herschell, and Fowler (Morley to Gladstone, 4 Jan. 1887, Add. Mss. 44255, f.177), and A. Morley reported to Gladstone (6 Jan.) that John Morley was anxious lest Harcourt and Herschell should be inclined to sacrifice principle. (Add. Mss. 44253. p.54). See also Morley to Spencer, 3 Jan. 1887, Miscellaneous, Althorp.

4 Granville to Gladstone, 13 Jan. 1887. Add Mss. 44180, f. 4.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.; Granville to Gladstone, 7 Jan. 1887, Add. Mss. 44180, f. 1 ; and Granville to Spencer, Miscellaneous, Althorp, 3 Jan. 1886.

result, he informed Gladstone, would be if Chamberlain were enabled to say that no serious difference existed between himself and the negotiators and that Gladstone was the obstacle.[1]

Spencer was comparatively friendly to the idea of the conference and was glad that Gladstone gave it his approval.[2] He believed that should it fail no harm would have been done and that to decline to meet Chamberlain would be a heavy responsibility.[3] Nevertheless, he feared that it would reveal diametrically opposed views on certain primary matters.[4] He thought it satisfactory that the proposal came from Chamberlain and remarked that the Gladstonians would have to take care to carry Parnell with them.[5] A couple of days later Spencer had modified his views to the extent of admitting that a failure of the conference would strengthen Chamberlain.[6] He still doubted that little would come of it, but thought that should Chamberlain really mean to rejoin the Gladstonians he would find out a way.[7]

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1 Granville to Gladstone, 13 Jan. 1887.

2 Spencer to Gladstone, 2 Jan. 1887, Add. Mss. 44313, f. 108.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Spencer to Granville, 4 Jan. 1887, P.R.O. 30.29.22A.

7 Ibid.

Wolverton was opposed to the conference. He mistrusted Harcourt and feared that Herschell was neither a genuine home ruler nor a match for Chamberlain.[1] He thought that the bulk of the staunchest Gladstonians had no wish for reunion, [2] and he dreaded lest the conference should weaken Gladstone's "splendid position," [3] or that the impression should be given, just when home rule was making progress, that the Gladstonians were willing to postpone or to modify their policy.[4] The Conservative majority, he believed, would be eliminated once the Government should have made a few more blunders,[5] and how, he asked, could Chamberlain avoid voting with the Gladstonians on all Liberal questions?[6]

The prospect of negotiations with Chamberlain gave rise to a surprising amount of satisfaction among Gladstonians. Arnold Morley reported to Gladstone on 31 December that the conference,

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1 Wolverton to Gladstone, 5 Jan. 1887, Add. Mss. 44349, f.223; and Wolverton to Granville, 6 Jan. 1887, P.R.O., 30.29.28A.

2 Wolverton to Granville, 30 Dec. 1886, P.R.O., 30.29.28A.

3 Wolverton to Granville, 6 Jan. 1887.

4 Wolverton to Granville, 7 Jan. 1887, P.R.O., 30.29.28A.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

even should it result in no agreement, would go a long way to satisfy some impatience which was being expressed at the absence of any response to Chamberlain's speech. [1] Some wished for Chamberlain's return because of genuine respect for him, and some simply because his loss would weaken the Government and be a disaster to the Liberal Unionists. Others were like Acton who wrote to Gladstone that they must not overestimate the strength of their cause and would do well to concede something to unrighteousness.[2] The group most consistently hostile to the conference was the Radicals - Chamberlain's enthusiastic supporters of twelve months earlier. With their characteristic scorn for half measures they had in the main committed themselves to full satisfaction of Irish Nationalist demands and now were alarmed lest the party's Irish policy should be compromised in order to buy back the man whom they had

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[1] A. Morley to Gladstone, 6 Jan. 1887, Add. Mss. 44253, f.54.

[2] Acton to Gladstone, 9 Jan, 1887, Selections from the correspondence of the first Lord Acton. Edited by J.N. Figgis and R.V. Laurence, I. 178-9.

come to hate and fear more than any other - the arch enemy "Judas" Chamberlain.[1]

The conference held its first sittings at Harcourt's London house on 13 and 14 January and then adjourned until after the assembling of Parliament.[2] At the first meeting the delegates agreed that no one other than Gladstone and Hartington should be informed of the proceedings. Irish land purchase and Irish local government were the main subjects discussed on the first day. Chamberlain submitted a scheme of land purchase which made Irish taxation the security for tenant repayment. His scheme aroused much criticism, but was accepted as a fair basis for further discussion. The conference agreed that Irish local government should be based on the principles that Liberals advocated for Great Britain, including the popular vote. Towards the end of the session Harcourt raised the question of home rule and Chamberlain suggested the Canada Act of 1867 as a foundation for their discussion. Also, Chamberlain admitted that provided the words "legislative authority or authorities" were

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1 Labouchere, the Radical leader, wrote to Churchill (23 Dec. 1886): "You have no idea of the feeling of the Radicals against him [Chamberlain]. There is a good deal of sentiment in these things; and just as Gladstone is their Christ, Joe is their Anti-Christ." (Churchill, II. 254).

2 Except where indicated, this account of the two sittings is based on Harcourt to Gladstone, 13 and 14 Jan. 1887, Add.Mss. 44201, f. 28; [redacted] on Chamberlain's minutes on the sittings, Chamberlain, 248-50 (q.w.o., Garvin, II. 286-7); and Harcourt's speech at Derby, 27 Feb. 1889, The Times, 28 Feb. 1889.

inserted, he had no objection to the Leeds resolution.[1]

The second meeting was devoted to home rule. The internal constitution of Canada was taken by common consent as a satisfactory basis from which to evolve a scheme. The Irish legislature, it was agreed, should be similar to a Canadian provincial assembly, and the Imperial Parliament should have an authority over it similar to that exercised by the Dominion Parliament. The conference then discussed in some detail the nature and powers of a suitable Irish legislature and agreement was reached on the following: that its powers should be specifically enumerated; that it should be given control of education and public works, and have an Irish local government board; that it should have some form of executive (whether or not it should control a police force seems to have been left unsettled because of objections from Trevelyan); that the Imperial Parliament should have its own Irish police force; and that no independent Imperial administration should be necessary in Ireland except for the armed forces and the Imperial police.

This is an impressive list, but of much greater importance was the fact that no agreement was reached on the problems of Irish representation in the Imperial Parliament and of Ulster.

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[1] The resolution defining the party's attitude to home rule passed at the National Liberal Federation Conference on 3 Nov. (See above p. 289). The part of the resolution which stated that Ireland must be given a settlement which would satisfy the views and wishes of the Irish representatives appears to have been conveniently ignored in these discussions.

Everyone, except Morley, wished to retain the Irish members at Westminister, but only Harcourt thought that they should have the right to vote on all subjects. Morley held to his old belief that they should be excluded altogether and either then, or at a later date, said that should the conference decide on full Irish representation he would yield, but would probably also retire from public life.[1] Chamberlain, who introduced the subject towards the close of the meeting, insisted that it was fundamental that Ulster must not be forced under the Irish legislature against its will and that it, or a part of it, must be given a separate one. Harcourt argued the difficulties and Morley said that he wished to consult others before finally committing himself. Both Chamberlain and Harcourt, in their accounts of the meeting, commented that they feared the Ulster problem would be the most difficult of all.

Morley, when describing the conference some fifteen years later, claimed that on home rule "Chamberlain gradually advanced the whole length".[2] During the conference he assured Ripon that the Gladstonian delegates had conceded nothing and that Chamberlain would not carry off "a single scrap of substance from us."[3] Such statements show how little Morley understood

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1 Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 252; and Garvin, II. 288.

2 Morley, III. 367.

3 Morley to Ripon, 7 Feb. 1887, q.w.o., Lucien Wolf, Life of the First Marquess of Ripon, II. 192.

Chamberlain's position on home rule. At the conference Chamberlain's attitude remained unaltered from what it had been in the struggle against the Government of Ireland Bill. His indispensible conditions still were, the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament, special treatment for Ulster, and the powers of the Irish assemblies to be specifically enumerated. Chamberlain's one major concession seems to have been his consent that the Irish legislature should control an executive.

Harcourt considered Trevelyan more recalcitrant in the discussions than Chamberlain,[1] while Morley described him as "a mere κωφον προσωπον - weak, irresolute, and shadowy." Afterwards Chamberlain told Harcourt that he would pay no attention to Trevelyan's hesitancy,[3] - an attitude which may have been an important factor in deciding Trevelyan some weeks later to revert to Gladstone.

In spite of the apparent progress made at the sessions on the 13th and 14th, certain things boded ill for ultimate success. One was the cool, almost unco-operative attitude

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1 Harcourt to Gladstone, 14 Jan. 1887, Add. Mss. 44201, f. 28.

2 Morley to Gladstone, 15 Jan. 1887, Add. Mss. 44255, f. 178; and Morley to Spencer, 15 Jan. 1887, Morley vol., Althorp.

3 Harcourt to Morley, 17 Jan. 1887, Gardiner (Appendix, I), II. 603-8.

of Gladstone. He stated that he had little hope of the conference succeeding for he believed that the Government of Ireland Bill had been too near the "irreducible minimum" [1] and that no financial provisions as good as those of the accompanying land bill could be devised without placing a hand on all Irish public receipts and making Irish authority dependent on surplus. [2] He informed Harcourt that he preferred that the Government should be allowed to apply their policy and on its failure that the Liberal Unionists should be allowed to apply their policy until it, too, should fail. [3]

A further unpropitious circumstance was that Morley's confidence in Chamberlain's good faith had been short - lived. Chamberlain and he met in a spirit of mutual distrust and nursing the smarts which they had inflicted on each other in verbal encounters during the preceding months. The discussions of the 13th and 14th did not alter Morley's opinion, [4] and he forecast that Chamberlain would use the Ulster question to break up the conference when it should suit him. [5] Harcourt

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1 Gladstone to Morley (draft), 21 Jan. 1887, Add, Mss. 44255, f. 184.

2 Ibid.

3 Gladstone to Harcourt (draft), 21 Jan. 1887, Add. Mss. 44201, f. 53.

4 Morley to Gladstone, 19 Jan. 1887, Add. Mss. 44255, f. 182.

5 Lord Harcourt's journal, 14 Jan. 1887, q.w.o., Gardiner, II. 28.

patiently strove to reassure Morley but without success.[1] Also of ill omen was the hostility, not only of the Parnellites, but of the Gladstonian Radicals. One of them (W.L. Bright, Stoke-upon-Trent) remarked to Dilke that the problem was to keep Gladstone in the Gladstonian party.[2] A few of them, as though acting on that idea, made speeches little calculated to aid the negotiations.

On the same day as the conference adjourned Chamberlain sent Hartington a brief general account of what had taken place.[3] Next day they met and Chamberlain gave fuller details than he had included in his letter.[4] Afterwards he told Harcourt, with whom he spent the following few days, that at the interview he gained the impression that on the whole Hartington was neither hostile to, nor annoyed by the conference and was wary rather than antagonistic.[5]

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1 Gardiner, II. Chap ii, passim. One particularly violent outburst against Chamberlain provoked Harcourt into retorting, "To my mind the least hopeful part of our business consists in your incurable inveteracy against J.C. I believe it to be unjust, but I despair of the task of convincing you of it." (Harcourt to Morley, 19 Jan. 1887, q.w.o., Gardiner, II.29).

2 Dilke to Chamberlain (copy) Add. Mss. 43953, f. 97; Gwynn and Tuckwell, II. 267; and Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 247.

3 Chamberlain to Hartington, 14 Jan. 1887, Chats. 340.2103.

4 Harcourt to Morley, 17 Jan. 1887, Gardiner (Appendix, I), II. 603-8.

5 Ibid.

At Hawick on 22 January Chamberlain made a speech of studies moderation in which he "tried to say smooth things all round except to the Parnellites." [1] He even expressed a belief that schemes could be evolved for the solution of the Irish land problem and for the granting of self government on the Canadian provincial model which would meet the objections, not only of both Liberal parties, but of Conservatives and Nationalists! [2] This advocacy of a national rather than a party settlement was for the benefit of Hartington and the Liberal Unionists, Chamberlain had explained to Harcourt. [3]

If Chamberlain had hoped that his speech would be followed by Gladstonian declarations in favour of the party going forward to meet him he was disappointed. Here and there he was praised for his moderate tone, and hopes of a reunion were expressed. Nonetheless, during the following few days it became increasingly clea r that even the more conciliatory Gladstonians were determined to stand by Gladstonian home rule. As Mundella

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1 Chamberlain to Hartington, 23 Jan. 1887, Chats. 340.2108.

2 The Times, 24 Jan. 1887.

3 Chamberlain to Harcourt (copy sent by Harcourt to Gladstone), 20 Jan. 1887, Add. Mss. 44201, f. 57.

explained on the 24th, the Gladstonians would not abandon "the grand central principle of Home Rule as agreed upon at Leeds," but were willing to discuss details and to strengthen safeguards.[1] The attitude of the Radicals remained unaltered and they continued with their attacks.[2]

The result was that when Chamberlain spoke in Birmingham seven days later the note of moderation was gone and in its place was one of defiant independence. Liberal reunion and a settlement of the Irish question were possible, he said, but only if all concerned - Irish as well as English - were to be moderate and mutually conciliatory. But as ominous for Liberal reconciliation as his hard speaking was Chamberlain's statement that he was "ready to support in Parliament in the present session all efforts to restore order in Parliament and to maintain the law in Ireland." At the same time he warned the Government that should their legislation turn out to be reactionary or inadequate, "the Government must take the responsibility of breaking up the Unionist party, for they know perfectly well that they cannot expect and have not obtained any pledge of unconditional support from any Liberal."[3]

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1 Speech to a conference of Gladstonians at Cardiff, Daily News, 25 Jan. 1887.

2 Truth (owned by Labouchere) was especially vindictive.

3 The Times, 31 Jan. 1887, p. 10.

The speech achieved its object of demonstrating that, although willing to negotiate, Chamberlain was in no mood for capitulating.[1] Unfortunately, it also exasperated all Gladstonians and some struck back with very outspoken attacks.[2] Even those most eager for a reconciliation asked one another whether it was worth while to persevere with the negotiations. Harcourt, who knew that Gladstone would pass through London on 2 February, wrote asking that he meet Morley and him in order to decide whether or not to continue with the conference.[3] Harcourt advocated that it should go on, but admitted that Chamberlain's speech, although not unsatisfactory in substance, had created "the worst possible feeling."[4] Gladstone replied asking Harcourt and Morley to meet him at Euston, but his letter miscarried. At Euston Gladstone soon guessed what had

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1 e.g. The Times commented, "Mr. Chamberlain . . . speaks to the electors of Birmingham in tones not at all resembling those of a man who has made up his mind to capitulate to Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Labouchere and Mr. Dillon." (31 Jan. 1887).

2 e.g. Dr. Spence Watson, the president of the Newcastle Liberal Association, when opening Morley's Newcastle meeting on 9 February, advised Chamberlain to keep a civil tongue in his head if he were anxious for peace, and said that the only thing which made the conference tolerable to the Radicals of Newcastle was that they had a reliable representative in Morley. (Daily News, 10 Feb. 1887 ).

3 Harcourt to Gladstone, 1 Feb. 1887, Add. Mss. 44201, f. 64.

4 Ibid.

happened and before continuing his journey wrote to Harcourt advising that the conference should not be broken off, but adding that neither signal nor telling good could come from the conclusion of an alliance with Chamberlain at that moment.[1]

Parliament reassembled on 27 January and in the Queen's speech was presented with a more than sufficient programme even had there been no prospect of obstruction. Alterations in legal procedure to enable the administration to cope effectively with the Plan of Campaign were promised, and it was foreshadowed than an important land measure would follow on the report, which was to be presented shortly, of the Commission on the working of the Irish Land Acts. The remainder of the programme was in the main similar to what Churchill had sketched in his Dartford speech: local government reform in England and Scotland to be followed, "should circumstances render it possible", by local government reform in Ireland; the improvement of the process of private bill legislation; facilities for cheaper and more rapid transfer of land, for the provision of allotments for small householders, and for the sale of glebe land; alterations in the method of levying tithes; reforms in the Scottish universities; the amendment of Scottish criminal procedure; the regulation of railway rates; and the prevention of the fraudulent use of trade marks.

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[1] Gardiner, II. 31.(No draft in Gladstone papers).

The debate on the address lasted for more than three weeks. Then, as had been expected, the Government introduced a measure amending the rules of procedure. Once again the Nationalists obstructed and not until 18 March was the measure finally passed by 262 votes to 41. On the motion of W.H. Smith it was made at once a standing order of the House. The power to use the closure was taken from the Speaker and given to the members themselves, with the limiting proviso that a motion for its use must have the support of more than 200 members, or be opposed by less than 40 and supported by more than 100.

Hartington spoke on 2 February at Newcastle-on-Tyne. He explained at length why the Liberal Unionists had declined to join in a coalition during the governmental crisis and censored Churchill for his resignation. He emplasised that it was a Liberal Unionist duty to assist the Government to enforce the law and to maintain order in Ireland. The Round Table Conference he wished well, he said, but added that he had thought it better not to take part himself because, "While negotiation is going on it is necessary that there should be someone who will stay at home and guard the position which we occupy, and who will keep a watch upon the movements of the enemy - and I thought that my place was rather there." He understood that Chamberlain's idea was to extend to Ireland (and to other parts of the British Isles should they wish it) on a larger scale and over large areas something similar to the municipal government of the big cities. He said that he thought such an idea was not so very different from his own and would not

endanger imperial interests. But he then warned that if the Conference were to concentrate on the details of a scheme rather than on general principles they would succeed only in causing greater confusion and in making the problem of reunion more insoluble than ever.[1]

Possibly a majority of Liberal Unionists, in and out of Parliament, could have been induced to subscribe to Hartington's statements about the conference and municipal type government for Ireland, but probably not so very many would have been willing to go much beyond them. A number were openly hostile to the conference and opposed to anything more than local government for Ireland. Among the latter were the Irish Liberal Unionists. [2]

Chamberlain keenly resented a speech which Morley made on 9 February. [3] Morley went far towards approving the Canadian province as a model for Ireland, but he also said that Chamberlain's recent speeches justified the resentment which

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1 The Times, 3 Feb. 1887.

2 The committee of the Ulster Liberal Unionist Association passed the following resolution: "That this committee, representing the Liberal Unionists of Ulster cordially sympathise with Mr. Chamberlain's programme for the reunion of the Liberal party - viz. to deal effectively with the questions of land reform and local government, but expresses its emphatic conviction that no reunion of the Liberal Party is possible on terms which would involve consent to the establishment of an Irish legislative body or of an executive not responsible to the Imperial Parliament or which would propose the abandonment in any degree of loyal Irishmen to the rule of the Nationalist local majority." (Northern Whig, 14 Feb. 1887).

3 Chamberlain to Harcourt, 10 Feb.1887, q.w.o., Gardiner, II. 32; and Chamberlain to Harcourt, 26 Feb. 1887. q.w.o., ibid., 34-35.

they had aroused, and that Chamberlain lacked good taste in discussing in public matters before the conference.[1] Chamberlain's anger was increased by other factors. He was much irritated by a daily column, which he wrongly believed Morley inspired, in the Newcastle Leader.[2] Also the Daily News over which Morley did have a strong influence had become less friendly.[3]

The conference reassembled at Trevelyan's house on 14 February for a third and, as it proved, a final meeting. At first Chamberlain was so cold and almost insulting to Morley that Trevelyan feared lest Morley should leave the house.[4] With the arrival of the good-natured Harcourt, a better spirit came to prevail.[5] The only matters on which agreement was reached were that Morley and Herschell should study certain aspects of Chamberlain's land scheme, and that Harcourt should draft a home rule scheme on the Canadian model, leaving as reserved the points on which there had been as yet no agreement.[6]

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1 The Times, 10 Feb. 1887.

2 Chamberlain to Harcourt, 26 Feb. 1887; Harcourt to Chamberlain, 1 March, 1887, q.w.o., Gardiner, II. 36-37; Morley to Chamberlain, 7 March 1887, Garvin, II.291.

3 When the proposal for a conference was being discussed at the beginning of January, Morley had written to Harcourt (3 Jan. 1887) "I think I will keep my hand on the D.N. [Daily News] helm for a few days, if the giant who edits it will let me." Gardiner, II.24.

4 Lord Harcourt's Journal, Gardiner, II. 32.

5 Gardiner, II. 32.

6 Chamberlain's minutes on the meeting, Chamberlain, 251, and Garvin, II. 292.

Distrusts and strained personal relations may have contributed to the lack of progress, but one suspects that the main explanation is that most of the matters on which agreement was possible had already been discussed, and agreed upon, at the first two sessions.

During the next few days events continued as before. The widespread belief that Chamberlain was engineering a "face saving" arrangement before capitulating remained unabated. Both speeches and press comments continued to make clear that the Gladstonians as a whole were not willing to make concessions except as to the form in which their next home rule measure would be cast. Gladstone in a published letter had accused the Liberal Unionists of blocking Liberal legislation, and especially Welsh disestablishment. The editor of the Baptist asked Chamberlain for his comment.[1] Chamberlain seized on the request and in a short article cast in the form of a letter to the Welsh non-conformists he roughly lectured the Gladstonians:

> If the Welsh constituencies intend ... to support his [Gladstone's] contention that no legislation for Scotland or Wales can be undertaken or even contemplated, until the Irish Question has been settled on his lines, then they have no right whatever to complain of the delay in their hopes ... The conversion of the country . . . may be, and probably will be, slow and protracted . . . but whether the process occupies a generation or a century, "poor little Wales" must wait until Mr. Parnell is satisfied and Mr. Gladstone's policy adopted.
>
> They will not wait alone. The crofters of Scotland and the agricultural labourers of England will keep them company. Thirty-two millions of people must go without much-needed legislation because three million are disloyal, while nearly six hundred members of the Imperial Parliament will be reduced to forced inactivity because some eighty delegates representing the policy and receiving the pay of the Chicago Convention, are determined to obstruct all business until their demands

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1 Garvin, II. 292.

> are conceded . . . . So long as the majority of the Liberal party is committed to proposals which a large section of Liberals and Radicals firmly believe to be dangerous to the best interests of the United Kingdom, unjust to the minority of the Irish people, and certain to end in the disruption of the Empire, so long the party will remain shattered and impotent and all reform will be indefinitely postponed . . . The only wise and prudent course for Welsh Nonconformists is to press on their leaders the absolute necessity for reuniting the Liberal party, so that this great instrument may once more be brought to bear with unimpaired efficiency to secure the reforms on which Liberals are practically agreed. The plans and methods for settling the Irish question which have been rejected must be set aside, and some alternative must be found which will take account of the objections conscientiously entertained by so many good and consistent Liberals. The breach which has been made must be repaired, and this can only be done by conciliatory action, and not by threats of expulsion or charges of treachery .. . .

The letter was reprinted in the daily press (25 February) and immediately wrote finis to the Round Table. It placed the Gladstonians in a position where they could continue the negotiations only by appearing to go down on their knees to Chamberlain. Gladstone, who had consented to draw up a memorandum on the points upon which the conference had reached agreement, now asked Harcourt to inform Chamberlain that the Baptist letter prevented him from doing so, but that the Gladstonians were willing that the discussions should stand for resumption at a convenient season.[1]

In the recriminations which later broke out the Gladstonians, understandably enough, claimed that Chamberlain had written the Baptist letter with the deliberate intention of making an end to the conference. The truth appears to be that Chamberlain, who on more occasions than this showed a surprising insensitivity when forecasting the reactions of others, did not fully realise the gravity of his action until too late. The attempt to reopen

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1 Gladstone to Harcourt (draft), 25 Feb. 1887, Add. Mss. 44201, f. 75.

negotiations on reunion which he was to make some five weeks later, and again in the following August,[1] makes it improbable that he chose deliberately what was pretty certain to be the irretrievable step of breaking up the conference. Dilke notes in his memoir that Chamberlain admitted to him that the Baptist letter had been indiscreet.[2] Chamberlain and his little band of followers had been returned by the kind of constituency which elsewhere had voted Gladstonian. Their victories had been largely due to Chamberlain's radicalism in the past, and to the loyalty of the Midland voters to their hard hitting champion of the political ring. But the weakness of a support which was based so much on the prestige and personality of one man was that it would be only as permanent as those qualities. This may well have been one reason why Chamberlain reacted so violently to the widespread assumption that he had returned repentant and by the conference was merely trying to find a way in which he could revert to Gladstone with the minimum of humiliation. Possibly, it was determination to disprove this which was the decisive factor in his decision to make the defiantly independent speech of 29 January and finally to send the fatal letter to the Baptist.

Gladstone had already completed his promised memorandum before the appearance of the letter and the document is still among his papers.[3] It was couched in conciliatory language, but

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1 See following chapter.

2 Dilke's memoir, Gwynn and Tuckwell, II. 268.

3 Memorandum by Gladstone, circa 24 Feb. 1887, Add. Mss. 44773, f. 8.

the hard substance was as follows. The conference, he observed, had shown that on home rule certain supposed differences did not exist and that the differences which did were not of a nature to prevent hope of an eventual accommodation. He pointed out that he was not entitled to approve or reject any proposed alteration in the Gladstonians' plans nor could his colleagues. He stated that in his long experience the ground for co-operation had always been supplied by a general confidence until the time for actual legislation had arrived, and that he thought an immediate attempt to settle too much legislative detail would be dangerous. He was not confident, he admitted, that the conference could do a great deal more just then, but, if Chamberlain desired it, he was willing to call his colleagues together and to learn their views on whether, and how far, negotiations could be continued beyond what had been done. In the last paragraph Gladstone did make one major concession. He stated that, although he should like to sift the matter further, he considered that a good and effective land purchase scheme could be framed without the use of Imperial credit, and that the question was almost ripe for decision.

The memorandum prompts one to speculate on what would have been the outcome had Chamberlain not written the Baptist letter. Gladstone declined to commit himself on a separate assembly for Ulster, on how the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament was to be guaranteed, or on whether or not the powers of the Irish assembly would be specifically enumerated. All three were fundamental demands on Chamberlain's part. On the other hand, Gladstone had gone so far to meet Chamberlain on the land question that if he

could have been induced to consent to the postponement of home rule, as Chamberlain had originally suggested, the prospect of a reunion would have been promising. However, the evidence indicates that Gladstone's prime object was not reunion, but home rule, and one suspects that, as in the previous summer, he was again willing to sacrifice his land scheme in the hope of furthering home rule. Hence one feels that it is most likely that even without the Baptist letter the conference would have been broken up by Gladstone's memorandum, or by the discussions which might have proceeded from it.

On the appearance of the Baptist letter Harcourt immediately wrote to Chamberlain pointing out that no amount of private negotiation could be of any use when he adopted such an attitude in public. He felt, he told him, that they had been engaged in the work of Sisyphus and that Chamberlain by his outburst of temper had sent the stone to the bottom just when, with great labour, it had been rolled to the top.[1] Chamberlain replied at once and his letter provides a better key to an understanding of him at this period than anything since written by biographers or historians. He wrote:

> I thank you for writing so plainly. I will do the same. I agree with you that our task is almost impossible - there is so much sensitiveness and feeling on both sides that the difficulties are nearly insurmountable.
>
> You seem to think that I am bound, while negotiation is still incomplete, to take no notice whatever of all that is offensive and objectionable to me in the communications that proceed from leading Gladstonians, and that I am to pass over in silence their repeated asseverations that no change - no concession of any kind is to be made by them, and that I am only to be allowed to come back, as they say, after sufficient and complete acts of submission and penitence. But I

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1 Harcourt to Chamberlain, 25 Feb. 1887, q.w.o., Gardiner, II. 33-34.

do not found myself only on the speeches of such men as Stansfeld, Campbell-Bannerman and Sir C. Russell, although the tone of these speeches is disagreeable in the highest degree. Neither will I refer again to the outrageous attack made upon me by J. Morley at Newcastle - nor to the general line of the organ of the Party - the Daily News - but I must advert to the language used in recent letters and speeches by Mr. Gladstone himself.

When in Wales he took more than one opportunity of nailing his flag to the mast. Everyone who reads his recent letters must draw the inference that he adheres to the whole of the policy to which I and other Liberals objected, and that he is not prepared to make the slightest concession. The effect of these statements has been very marked. It is said in the Liberal papers, without exception, that as Mr. Gladstone has declared that he will not give way, the only chance of reunion must lie in my "caving in," and that this is what I am now doing. To use the words of J. Morley's organ at Newcastle, I am "furtively preparing for surrender." . . .

I must point out to you that a compromise is one thing, but an abject surrender such as is attributed to me is another, and I cannot afford to give colour to such an accusation.

Now as regards my article. I do not admit that it bears the interpretation you put upon it.. . .

I consider the present situation very grave. Never has party feeling run higher . . . and if the future programme of the Liberal Party is to include plans of campaign, obstruction and Heaven knows how many wild theories of revenge or destruction, I must stand aside or join to resist them.. . .

I have hitherto done my best to prevent Hartington from joining a Coalition and I have always rejected the possibility of my doing so. But if things continue on their present footing I must either go out of politics altogether - or assist in forming some third Party that will strenuously resist the new Programme of Labouchere and Co. while ready to give effect to the older policy of Constructive Liberalism. . . .[1]

During the next few days a heated correspondence passed between Chamberlain and Harcourt, but with Harcourt showing a marked desire

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[1] Chamberlain to Harcourt, 26 Feb. 1887, Chamberlain, 254-6 (q.w.o., Gardiner, II. 34-35).

to prevent the break up of the conference.[1] On 1 March Chamberlain pressed for a decision on whether the conference was at an end or to be continued,[2] but next day Harcourt replied that he saw no need for haste.[3] Also on the 1 March, Chamberlain sent Hartington the rough draft of a home rule scheme which he informed him he hoped the conference might be induced to adopt. He asked for criticism and if Hartington could negotiate on such a basis.[4] (Chamberlain had already given him a copy of his Irish land purchase scheme at the time when he laid it before the conference.[5]).

Next day Chamberlain and Harcourt met and Chamberlain was left with the impression that the Gladstonians had decided that a continuance of the conference must depend on Hartington's attitude.[6]

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1 Chamberlain - Harcourt correspondence, 26, and 27 Feb., and 1 March, Gardiner, II. 35-37; and brief synopses of correspondence, 26, 27, 28, and 29 Feb. and 1 March, Chamberlain, 256-7.

2 Chamberlain to Harcourt, 1 March 1887, brief synopsis, Chamberlain, 257.

3 Harcourt to Chamberlain, 2 March 1887, brief synopsis, Chamberlain, 257.

4 Chamberlain to Hartington, 1 March 1887, Chats. 340.2112.

5 Chamberlain to Hartington, 23 Jan. 1887, Chats. 340.2108.

6 Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 258. Chamberlain did not completely misunderstand Harcourt. Harcourt in a speech at Derby on 27 Feb. 1889 (The Times, 28 Feb. 1889) stated that he had expressed the opinion to Chamberlain that Hartington's views should be more fully ascertained, and that he had pressed for the resumption of the conference after a sufficient interval. Morley in conversation with Chamberlain five weeks later claimed that the break down of the conference had two causes: "a. his own Chamberlain's masterful demeanour, as shown in the Baptist letter and other deliverances. b. the fact that Hartington had made it impossible for himself and friends to desert the Tories and Goschen, - whatever we did at the Round Table." (Morley to Gladstone, 10 April, 1887, Add. Mss. 44255, f. 191).

Chamberlain jumped to the conclusion that the Gladstonians had decided to side-step him by direct negotiations with Hartington.[1] To defeat what he assumed was their plan he contacted Hartington[2] and asked him for a written statement of his views which he could communicate to the conference at its next session.[3] Hartington agreed to the request and, in addition, he appears to have at last consented to join in the negotiations - provided, of course, that he could do so on his own terms.[4]

Hartington's statement does not reveal any major fact which is not already known from his previous statements (especially his election address of the previous June and his speech of 2 February). Once again he is shown to be neither a reactionary nor a "Rip Van Winkle." Although genuinely hankering after reunion, he was as determined as ever not to modify his attitude on home rule. The letter ran:

> . . . The discussion [at the Conference] seems to have assumed its most definite form on the question of Land Purchase on which you have prepared a scheme. I see nothing in the general character of this scheme to which I need take any objection in principle. . . . As to Local Government, I understand your position to be that . . . you have expressed your willingness to discuss proposals, provided that the measure of last year is definitely withdrawn; and subject to the conditions which you have stated in your speeches. Further, you have insisted, not as new conditions, but as consequences of those which you have previously contended for, that Ulster or a part of Ulster should be represented by a separate council, that judges should be appointed by the Imperial Government, and that the Irish constabulary should be maintained and controlled by the

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1 Morley to Gladstone, 10 April 1887; and Dilke's memoir, Gwynn and Tuckwell, 268.

2 Dilke's memoir, ibid.

3 Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 258.

4 Chamberlain to Hartington, 7 March 1887, Chats. 340.2114.

> same authority. I believe that these conditions do not differ in principle from those which I attempted to formulate last year in my address to my constituents. I do not consider that they were complete or exhaustive, but I have no desire to make them more stringent.. . . it is certain that unless the provisions for the maintenance of the authority of the Imperial Parliament and Government ar made strong, simple, and effective, the concession which may be made will be used for extorting complete separation and independence.
>
> For this reason I doubt the applicability of the precedent of the constitution of the Dominion of Canada.. . . it might possibly be safer to look for a solution in the direction . . . of such extended municipal institutions and powers as have been conferred on our large cities, and as are proposed to be conferred upon counties.. . . I am very far from saying that I have a clear idea of the extent to which this principle might be applied to solve the Irish question. Neither do I say that the difficulties of the subordinate responsible Government system are insuperable. But I feel strongly the necessity . . . to bear in mind the danger of assuming that a system which might work admirably in the case of a people which desired union would be prudent in the opposite case of a people who had been brought to desire the largest possible measure of separation.[1]

Chamberlain at once wrote informing Harcourt that he had received Hartington's letter and, having pointed out that Hartington would not enter the conference until he knew that his conditions were accepted, pressed for an immediate meeting to discuss both the letter and Gladstone's memorandum.[2] He then informed Hartington of his letter to Harcourt, remarking that the next step was to see how far Gladstone and his colleagues assented "to the fundamental conditions on which you and I alike insist."[3] He stated that should the meeting, which he had asked for, not be granted he would assume that Harcourt wished to break off negotiations and would act accordingly.

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1 Hartington to Chamberlain (draft), 6 March 1887, Chats. 340.2113 (Chamberlain, 258-261; and q.w.o., Holland, II. 186-8).

2 Chamberlain to Hartington, 7 March 1887, Chats. 340.2114 (Chamberlain, 261).

3 Ibid.

Next day Chamberlain received a reply from Harcourt, in which, according to Chamberlain's memoir, Harcourt repeated his views on the Baptist letter and refused either to break off the conference or to proceed with it at once. This Chamberlain regarded as sufficiently unsatisfactory to warrant the ending of the negotiations, a step which he took at once.[1] Thus ended the Round Table Conference.

Once again Chamberlain's two later attempts to reopen the negotiations prevent one from hastily concluding that he broke off the conference in order to prevent an accommodation. Superficially, it is true, the prospect that Hartington might be induced to join appeared the most important and most promising event since the conference was first mooted. But, as Chamberlain was probably well aware, the reality was different for it was improbable that Gladstone would consent to the adoption of Hartington's municipal type home rule as a basis for negotiations. The Government were about to introduce their promised coercion bill, at least the principle of which, Chamberlain was determined to support, and he may have felt that a conference which already had had such a precarious existence could never survive the inevitable public clashes between the Gladstonians and himself on coercion. But perhaps most important of all, Chamberlain had come to the conclusion that the Gladstonians no longer wished to do business with him.[2]

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1 Chamberlain to Harcourt, 8 March 1887, q.w.o., Garvin, II. 294.

2 Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 262.

Chamberlain believed that the Gladstonians were hopeful that if they were to bide their time he would be glad to accept their terms when he should be faced with the alternative of publicly supporting coercion.[1] "But they felt," he states in his memoir, "that if the conference ended in the adoption of a Land Scheme proposed by me, and of a Local Government Scheme based upon the internal constitution of Canada, it would be held to be a victory for my views, and would not be accepted by a large number of their followers."[2]

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1 Morley to Gladstone, 10 April 1887, Add. Mss. 44255, f. 191; and Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 262.

2 Chamberlain's memoir, loc. cit.

# CHAPTER VIII

## THE LIBERAL UNIONISTS BECOME RECONCILED TO THEIR POSITION

In spite of the break up of the Round Table Conference, hopes of reunion lingered among both Liberal Unionists and Gladstonians. These hopes, combined with the reluctance of either side to be credited with having repulsed the other, influenced events for some time. Trevelyan had a three-quarters of an hour interview with Gladstone early in the second week of March.[1] Afterwards Gladstone told Granville that it had been very amiable, "but you cannot get out of a box more than is in it."[2] In the same week Herschell had a long conversation with Hartington and gained the impression that Hartington was altering his opinions.[3] Morley thought this likely but expected that the alterations would not be sufficiently extensive.[4]

On 12 March Chamberlain spoke in Birmingham. He listed eight conditions to which a future home rule bill would have to conform if Liberal reunion were to be possible. These

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1 Granville to Spencer, 10 March 1887, Miscellaneous, Althorp.

2 Ibid.

3 Morley to Spencer, 12 March 1887, Morley vol., Althorp.

4 Ibid.

conditions he claimed had been specified not only by himself, but by Hartington, James, Trevelyan, and other Liberal Unionists in their criticisms of Gladstone's Irish bills of the previous year. He declared that he had done all that he could towards reconciliation and that a settlement now depended upon Gladstone and on him alone. Chamberlain said that he would support the Government in maintaining law and order in Ireland, but that in return he expected it to deal with oppression by landlords. He expressed the hope that the Government would produce a major land measure which would give the tenants practical ownership of their land. Finally, Chamberlain advised the Radical Unionists to take into account the possibility that there would be no reunion and to extend their party organisation, especially outside of Birmingham. They must be prepared, he said, to fight three-cornered contests whenever possible.[1]

Harcourt was still determined to do all things possible towards achieving reunion. On reading Chamberlain's speech of the 12th he wrote at once to Gladstone that (strange as it may seem!) he considered it to be Chamberlain's largest advance towards conciliation as yet and that it required serious consideration. Chamberlain, he stated, evidently was being conciliatory under strong pressure from his friends. Chamberlain's threat to organise Radical Unionists throughout the country with the object of fighting three-cornered

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[1] The Times, 14 March 1887, p. 10.

contests he dismissed as "a mere silly brutum fulmen."[1]

Gladstone was to speak at a dinner on 17 March. On the 16th Harcourt wrote pressing him to use the occasion to express willingness to re-consider the particulars of the home rule bill of the previous year as distinct from its underlying principles, and to announce concurrence in Chamberlain's statement that British credit should not be pledged in any Irish land purchase scheme.[2]

At the dinner Gladstone seems to have done his best to meet Harcourt's views. He referred to the Liberal Unionists in friendly and respectful terms and stated that his policy was "real and effective self-government in affairs properly and exclusively Irish, subject to the unquestionable supremacy of the Imperial Parliament". He said that he could not recede from that policy, but that he sought improvements in the legislative proposals which he had made. He recognised, he said, that the country, as well as the majority of Liberals, was against his scheme to use Imperial credit for the buying out of the Irish landlords. He affirmed that he still had faith in that method, but admitted that an alternative scheme could be framed which would avoid the general use of Imperial credit. He added that such a scheme would have to be dependent upon the prior creation of an Irish government.

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1 Harcourt to Gladstone, 13 March 1887, Add. Mss. 44201, f. 81.

2 Harcourt to Gladstone, 16 March 1887, Add. Mss. 44201, f. 87.

In spite of this last condition, Gladstone thus publicly conceded Chamberlain's main demand on Irish land purchase - a concession which it will be remembered he had included in the suppressed memorandum of c. 24 February.

This major concession and the conciliatory tone of Gladstone's speech may have upset Chamberlain's belief that Gladstone had no wish for an arrangement. At any rate towards the end of the month he mentioned to Lady Hayter and to Lord Thring that he would have liked to have discussed the political situation with Gladstone.[1] Both passed the remark to Gladstone and in a day or two they were able to inform him that, if he were to make the first move, Gladstone would consent to a secret interview.[2]

Chamberlain adopted the suggestion and an interview was arranged for 5 April. Neither man seems to have had more than a slight hope that it would result in anything practical. Gladstone wrote to Chamberlain that, although considerable progress had been made on home rule and land purchase at the Round Table Conference, coercion and closure had since then widened the party breach and would have to be considered first.[3] Chamberlain in his reply painted a glowing picture of the

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1 Granville to Lord Thring (draft), 31 March 1887, P.R.O., 30.29.22A; Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 262; and Garvin, II. 295.

2 Ibid.

3 Gladstone to Chamberlain (draft), 3 April 1887, Add. Mss. 44126, f. 189 (Chamberlain, 262).

amount of agreement reached at the conference[1] and laid the blame for the subsequent widening and hardening of the party split on the refusal to provide him with Gladstone's views. He then pointed out that in default of an alternative policy the great majority of Liberal Unionists had become practically pledged to support the second reading of the "coercion" bill, and that it was very doubtful whether they could now be brought to co-operate with Gladstone's followers even if a suitable policy were to be found.[2]

At the interview[3] Gladstone said that he thought Hartington would never agree to any scheme which Parnell would accept, and that he feared coercion would have to be fought out in Parliament and the country before Liberals

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[1] He wrote, "The exact nature of the policy on which agreement was possible had been ascertained. It was only necessary to approve or reject what we had done in order to settle the question of reunion and the future actions of the Unionist Party with respect to the Government." One is tempted to assume that Chamberlain was over-stating the amount of agreement reached in order to justify his having asked for an interview. However, his statement was in a sense true if one were to ignore Morley's reservations and objections at the conference. On 2 July 1887 Harcourt wrote to Gladstone, "I was of opinion that we had reached a substantial agreement at the Conference and that a basis of reunion was established. That as far as I can make out was the opinion of all the parties at the Conference except perhaps Morley." (Harcourt to Gladstone, Add. Mss. 44201, f. 132). Seven years later Harcourt was still of the same opinion. (Morley's notes on a conversation with Harcourt, 1894, Viscount Morley, Recollections, I. 297).

[2] Chamberlain to Gladstone, 4 April 1887, Add. Mss. 44126, f. 189 (Chamberlain, 264-5).

[3] This account of the interview is based on Gladstone's memorandum, 5 April 1887, Add. Mss. 44773, f. 35; and Chamberlain's memorandum, 5 April 1887, Chamberlain, 266-8 (q.w.o., Garvin, II. 295-6).

could make with profit a further attempt to agree upon an Irish policy. He suggested that the Liberal Unionists should produce an Irish local government measure and that the Gladstonians might accept it as the best under the circumstances. Chamberlain replied that such a step was not possible. With perhaps unnecessary frankness he admitted that coercion was damaging the Liberal Unionists in the country; that the right wing of the party would probably join the Conservatives; and that he himself might leave Parliament should Toryism become dominant.

In the memorandum which Chamberlain drew up later on the same day he stated that the interview had given him the impression that Gladstone confidently expected the unpopularity of coercion to bring on an early general election which he would win, and that as a result he neither desired to go further with conciliation nor believed that his party would let him. Chamberlain may have considered this information to have been in itself a sufficient justification for the interview. Knowing that all hope of reunion depended on Gladstone's attitude, he must have welcomed an opportunity of discovering what that attitude was. He could then lay his own plans accordingly and with a confidence which he could not otherwise have had.

On 5 March Hicks-Beach resigned the Irish Secretaryship for health reasons.[1] Salisbury appointed his own nephew, the

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[1] Lady Victoria Hicks-Beach, Life of Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, I. 312-13.

young and untried Arthur Balfour, to his place. The appointment aroused much misgiving, but Balfour more than justified the choice and proved himself a firm and constructive ruler. He had not quite Hicks-Beach's sympathy for oppressed tenants, or at least he did not imitate his gallant attempts to put extra-constitutional pressure on ruthless landlords.

Balfour on 28 March introduced the awaited "coercion" measure - the Criminal Law Amendment (Ireland) Bill. The measure granted powers which could be put into force at any time by a vice-regal proclamation and, unlike previous "coercive" measures, was to have no time limit. It provided for preliminary inquiries by magistrates into crimes where no one was charged, and re-established a summary jurisdiction to be exercised by two stipendary magistrates (with power to punish with up to six months imprisonment) in cases of criminal conspiracy, boycotting, rioting, assault on the police, and forcible or wrongful possession. Special juries and the removal of trials were arranged for as in the act of 1882. A dubious and more novel proposal allowed a change of venue to England in grave criminal cases when the attorney generals of both countries certified that a fair trial was not otherwise possible. The Lord Lieutenant was given the power to proclaim certain types of organisations and to subject to summary jurisdiction anyone who should defy the proclamation. An important restriction was that a proclamation had to be submitted at once to Parliament.

The Times stated that the bill was imperative if Ireland was to remain a civilized community.[1] The Standard considered that the situation fully justified its provisions.[2] The Daily News wrote that the measure was simple, intelligible, and bad, and that if the Liberal Unionists were to support such a monstrous bill they and the Gladstonians would have to part company.[3] The Daily Telegraph declared that no well-disposed and law-abiding Englishman, whose sense of right and wrong had not been corrupted by political partizanship, would regard the unquestionably stern provisions as one wit too severe.[4] The Manchester Guardian wrote that the bill was a declaration of war upon the Irish Nationalists and would be welcomed by every mischief monger who wished to perpetuate the ill-will between Ireland and England.[5] The Scotsman held that the question to be faced was whether the National League or the Government was to rule Ireland and maintained that the bill would strike only criminals and persons who incited to crime.[6] The Northern Whig strongly disapproved of the bill, which it described as coercion, and in certain

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1 The Times, 29 March 1887, p. 9.

2 Standard, 29 March 1887, p. 4.

3 Daily News, 29 March 1887, p. 4.

4 Daily Telegraph, 29 March 1887, p. 5.

5 Manchester Guardian, 29 March 1887, p. 5.

6 Scotsman, 30 March 1887, p. 6.

respects stringent coercion. It complained that the measure as a whole was not clear, intelligible, or systematic.[1] The Irish Times admitted that the bill was a severe one, but it considered that it was less arbitrary than Gladstone's crimes bill had been. It approved the proposed permanency of the bill.[2] The Liberal Unionist Christian World wrote that the permanent abrogation of some of the most cherished rights of free men would be bitterly resented and would make the government of Ireland more difficult. It pointed out that, if the press and platforms were gagged, disaffection would find expression in secret and dangerous societies, and in outbursts of savage crime.[3] The Gladstonian Methodist Times declared that the bill would deprive Irishmen for ever of the sacred rights which distinguished human beings from the cattle of the fields.[4]

On the whole the Liberal Unionists reluctantly accepted the principle that conditions in Ireland made necessary some form of "coercion". But they considered that the "change of venue" and certain other clauses in the Government's measure interfered unnecessarily with the liberty of the individual and they at once began to press for their alteration. The Government gave way. At a meeting of the

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1 Northern Whig, 30 March 1887, p. 4.

2 Irish Times, 29 March 1887, p. 4.

3 Christian World, 7 April 1887, p. 263.

4 Methodist Times, 7 April, 1887, p. 209.

Liberal Unionists members at Devonshire House on 30 April Hartington was able to state that the Government did not consider the "change of venue" clause to be vital, and that it was willing to make in the bill any reasonable alterations which the Liberal Unionists should consider essential.[1] The Devonshire House meeting agreed to take no public action which might embarrass the Government and it appointed a committee to draft the amendments which Liberal Unionists wished to have adopted.[2] These amendments the Government eventually accepted and the bill was ensured of full support by the Liberal Unionists in the third reading, which despite the new closure rules, did not take place until 9 July.

Coercion had always been distasteful to Liberals and the Liberal Unionist support of the Criminal Law Amendment Bill cost them a number of supporters in the constituencies, and one member (A.B.Winterbotham, Cirencester) in the Commons.[3] Chamberlain's Birmingham "Two

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1 The Times, 2 May 1887, p. 9.

2 Ibid.

3 Altogether during this parliament six Liberal Unionists reverted to Gladstone and one Gladstonian, Sir A.Cowell-Stepney, became a Liberal Unionist. In the Lords three Liberal Unionists became Conservatives and two, Bessborough and Ribblesdale, returned to Gladstone. The six Liberal Unionist members were : T.R.Buchanan, W. Edinburgh (resigned and restood for his seat as a Gladstonian, Feb. 1888 and was re-elected) W.S.Caine, Barrow-in-Furness (resigned and unsuccessfully restood for his seat as an "Independent Liberal", June 1890. Elected for E.Bradford as a Gladstonian, July 1892); Sir T.F.Grove, Wilton, Wiltshire (re-elected for Wilton as a Gladstonian, July 1892); Sir B.Hingley, N. Worcestershire (re-elected for N. Worcestershire as a Gladstonian, July 1892); C.R.M.Talbot, Mid.Glamorgan (died Feb. 1890), and A.B.Winterbotham, Cirencester, Gloucestershire (re-elected for Cirencester as a Gladst

Thousand" defied him by passing a resolution condemning the bill.[1] Chamberlain, whose prestige had already been damaged by the misrepresentations of his aims and motives during the Round Table Conference, was much disquieted by its action. He declared that, but for the responsibility which he shouldered, he would gladly resign at once and leave politics altogether.[2] The Liberal Unionist ranks would have suffered a much more substantial exodus but for two facts. The first was the knowledge that John Bright gave a general support to the measure.[3] The second, and perhaps more important, was the publication by The Times on 18 April[4] of a letter in facsimile which, if genuine, proved Parnell to have been in contact with Irish nationalist extremists, and to have connived at the murder of Lord Frederick Cavendish and T.H.Burke in 1882.

Unionists with hardly an exception assumed that the facsimile letter was genuine, and not many Gladstonians would have cared to wager heavily on the certainty of its being a forgery. Unionists were jubilant at having found,

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1 Garvin, II. 318.

2 Chamberlain to Rev. R.W.Dale, 25 April 1887, Garvin, II. 318.

3 Bright voted with the Government on the motion for precedence for the Criminal Law (Ireland) Amendment Bill. (25 March 1887).

4 18 April was the day on which the second reading of the Criminal Law Amendment Bill took place and possibly The Times had deliberately chosen it in order to give the maximum of assistance in the passing of that measure.

as they thought, the Achilles' heel of home rule. The reaction of the majority of Gladstonians was typified by that of a Gladstonian friend of R.B.O'Brien. On seeing the facsimile the friend exclaimed, "There goes Home Rule and the Liberal Party too", and straightway lost all appetite for his breakfast.[1] Late on the evening of the 18th Parnell denounced the letter in the Commons as an audacious and unblushing fabrication.[2] The Times replied by challenging him to prove his assertion in a court of law.[3] Parnell declined to take up the challenge and, much to the immediate advantage of the unionist cause, took no step to disprove the accusation until the summer of 1888.

The Times had originally intended to publish the facsimile letter on the morning of the opening of Parliament in the hope that it would do much to secure an effective "coercion" bill that session.[4] It had desisted when it discovered what appeared to be double-dealing by the secretary of the Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union from whom the letter had been obtained.[5] The secretary was able to satisfy on his honesty of purpose,[6] but The Times then

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1 R.B.O'Brien, The life of Charles Stewart Parnell, II. 198.

2 Hansard, CCCXII, cols. 1225-32.

3 The Times, 20 April 1887, p. 11.

4 History of 'The Times', III. 48.

5 Ibid., 48-49.

6 Ibid.

decided to further delay publication in order first to prepare the public by a series of articles aimed at proving that Parnell and his colleagues were closely linked with disloyal and criminal extremists.[1] Four of the articles appeared before 18 April and a further ten at intervals during the rest of the year. For long to come these articles provided unionists with a convenient store of munition for the war of accusation and verbal abuse which was never still for long on the public platforms.

The introduction of the Criminal Law Amendment Bill was followed three days later by the introduction of the Irish Land Bill in the House of Lords. For the first time leaseholders, who numbered some 150,000, were to be given the right to a judicial revision of rent. A landlord who had obtained a judgment of eviction was to be allowed to make the tenant "a caretaker" instead of evicting him at once. County courts were to have the power to stay evictions and, when the tenant was honestly insolvent, to relieve him from the whole or part of his debts as though he had been declared bankrupt. If the court should consider him deserving the tenant was to be replaced in his holding at a fair rent. Minor provisions were that a landlord who could not collect rents was to be excused the payment of rates, and that a leaseholder who had sublet could throw up his lease should a court reduce the rent of his tenants. The measure ignored the two most important recommendations

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1 Ibid., 49-50.

of the Cowper Commission. These were that judicial rents should be fixed according to the price of produce, and that the revision of them (especially those fixed before 1886) should be allowed after a shorter period than fifteen years.

The Irish Land Bill pleased the Liberal Unionists in some of its provisions but keenly disappointed them in others. The Chamberlainites, and the Ulster tenant farmer representatives, Russell and Lea, especially deplored the refusal to allow the revision of judicial rents, or the fixing of rents according to the price of farm produce. Many Liberal Unionists condemned the "bankruptcy clauses" and other aspects of the measure. Nevertheless, the Government had been careful to consult Hartington on the main features of the bill and he had assented to their proposals. Hartington admitted this in a speech some time later. He explained that he had decided against the revision of judicial rents lest such a step would retard the passing of a major land purchase scheme.[1]

Balfour sent Chamberlain a draft of the bill on the eve of its introduction to the Lords. Chamberlain replied that it was quite inadequate and warned that disaster would follow unless it were amended. Everything was guarded in the interests of the landlords, he declared. He pointed out that the Criminal Law Amendment Bill would strengthen the landlords and hence the Irish Land Bill must be so shaped that no one

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[1] Hartington's speech, 5 Aug. 1887, The Times, 6 Aug. 1887, p. 10.

could doubt that it was to protect the tenants.[1] Next day in a further letter Chamberlain stated his attitude more concretely: "What we want broadly is that no tenant shall be evicted and deprived of his property on the ground of inability or unwillingness to pay an unjust rent, and we want the Court to say in every case whether the rent is under the circumstances unjust."[2]

The Times described the Irish Land Bill as a large and thorough-going measure.[3] The Standard emphasised that it was not intended to be a full or permanent settlement as the Government believed that such a settlement could be found only in the extinction of the dual ownership system of land holding.[4] The Daily Telegraph welcomed the measure as an honest and courageous attempt to correct some of the graver mischiefs inherent in the Land Act of 1881.[5] The Spectator thought the bill a good one and much more far-reaching than it appeared at first sight.[6] The Birmingham Daily Post wrote that it was unquestionably a real effort to solve the

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1 Chamberlain to Balfour, 30 March 1887, Garvin, q.w.o., II. 303-4.

2 Chamberlain to Balfourt, 31 March 1887, q.w.o., ibid., II. 304-5.

3 The Times, 1 April 1887, p. 9.

4 Standard, 1 April 1887, p. 4.

5 Daily Telegraph, 1 April 1887, p. 4.

6 Spectator, 2 April 1887, p. 451.

immediate difficulty and thus to give time for the preparation of a larger and final measure. The bill, it remarked, was a marvellous advance upon the views on Irish land hitherto held by Conservative ministers.[1] The Northern Whig welcomed the bill as a remedial measure, good in so far as it went, and assumed that it would be followed up by a major land purchase bill.[2] The Daily News commented that the provisions of the bill were few, but that, such as they were, they convicted ministers of the grossest inconsistency and entirely justified Parnell's action in the autumn session.[3]

Gladstone in further speeches on 19 April and 11 May restated that he did not adhere to his defeated home rule bill in all particulars, but only to the underlying principles.[4] Then on 18 May Trevelyan made a conciliatory speech at the Manchester Reform Club.[5] By the latter date Harcourt had become convinced that Gladstone's general declarations were inadequate, and that the only hope of reconciliation lay in a public statement by Gladstone of the specific changes which he would consent to in the Government of Ireland Bill, and especially in the clauses

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1 Birmingham Daily Post, 1 April 1887, p. 4.

2 Northern Whig, 1 April 1887, p. 4.

3 Daily News, 1 April 1887, p. 4.

4 The Times, 20 April 1887, p. 12, and 12 May 1887, p. 10.

5 Ibid., 19 May 1887, p. 6.

excluding Irish representation from Westminster.[1] Gladstone had no inclination to commit himself in such a manner[2] and relations between Harcourt and him became strained. Morley reported that he had never seen Harcourt so violent as he was with Gladstone on the front bench of the Commons.[3] Finally Harcourt demanded a meeting of the ex-Cabinet for the purpose of deciding what changes in the Government of Ireland Bill, and especially in the provision which excluded the Irish members,[4] they should publicly announce themselves willing to make.[5] Gladstone argued the objections but Harcourt persisted and Gladstone reluctantly prepared to meet his request.[6] A little later Harcourt changed his mind and wrote to Gladstone that he no longer wanted the meeting.[7] Perhaps he had come to realise that a step with such an appearance of bullying Gladstone would be

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1 Gladstone to Granville (letter 2), 20 May 1887, P.R.O., 30.29.29A; and Harcourt to Gladstone, 24 May 1887, Add. Mss. 44201, f. 111.

2 Gladstone to Granville (letter 2), 20 May 1887. In this letter Gladstone commented, "H[arcourt] will I think harp upon the idea, to my mind most visionary, that the Dissentient M.P.s are reclaimable. But he appears so set out on this excellent but impossible purpose in the manner rather of a gobe-mouches. He first of all took it on the credit of Chamberlain who made some pretentions and might carry five men. Now he harps upon the speech of Trevelyan who I believe makes no pretentions and does not carry one."

3 Granville to Gladstone, 20 May 1887, Add.Mss. 44180, f.38.

4 Ibid.

5 Gladstone to Granville (letter 2), 20 May 1887.

6 Ibid.; and Gladstone to Granville (letter 1), 20 May 1887, P.R.O., 30.29.29A.

7 Gladstone to Granville (letter 2), 20 May 1887.

much resented (Spencer and Granville agreed that it was monstrous[1]), and that Morley, Spencer, and Granville would be certain to resist strenuously the admission of the Irish.

Harcourt had not abandoned his views. On the 24th he wrote that, although originally he had supported strongly the exclusion of the Irish members, he now believed that if the home rule cause were not to retrogress their admission "must be definitely conceded and that by a positive declaration on your part." He argued that to admit the Irish members for specific subjects would be impossible in practice and that they would have to be admitted to all the business of the Commons.[2]

Gladstone, although unwilling to make public commitments of the type demanded by Harcourt, was keen to detach Trevelyan from the Liberal Unionists. After discussions with Morley, Granville, Whitbread, and Spencer he sent him a letter (24 May) and invited him to dinner on the following day.[3] In the letter Gladstone pointed out that he had never taken his stand on unconditional exclusion of Irish representation and he assured Trevelyan that he would not stand in the way of a more restricted scheme of home rule than the Government of Ireland Bill, provided that the

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1 Granville to Gladstone, 20 May 1887.

2 Harcourt to Gladstone, 24 May 1887, Add. Mss. 44201, f. 111.

3 Gladstone to Harcourt (draft), 25 May 1887, Add. Mss. 44201, f. 117.

scheme was desired by the Irish nation. He also wrote that he was willing to meet Hartington in a conference should Hartington wish it.[1] This last statement Gladstone described as perhaps the principal part of the letter and admitted that it had been suggested by Whitbread.[2] Gladstone had intended his letter for publication but both Harcourt and Trevelyan advised against it.[3] Harcourt wrote to Gladstone that he feared the reservations in the letter to Trevelyan more than counterbalanced the assurances, and that it would be regarded as a declaration against alterations in the proposals of twelve months earlier. He objected that no one was prepared to produce a scheme of limited home rule and that the Nationalists would not accept it. There was not the least prospect, he stated, that Hartington would express a wish for a conference because he was much too well satisfied with conditions as they were. He maintained that the only hope lay in independent declarations by Gladstone which might detach from the Liberal Unionists the men sincerely anxious for reconciliation. Harcourt then informed Gladstone that Chamberlain was about to take his

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1 Gladstone to Trevelyan (draft), 24 May 1887, Add. Mss. 44335, f. 216.

2 Gladstone to Harcourt (draft), 25 May 1887.

3 Harcourt to Gladstone, 27 May 1887, Add. Mss. 44201, f. 121.

stand at a conference in Birmingham on four propositions[1] (a copy of which he enclosed) and that he believed these four propositions expressed the sentiments, not only of the Liberal Unionists, but of the great majority of their own party. If Chamberlain were able to represent himself as an advocate of them and the Gladstonians as opponents he would increasingly draw the Gladstonian supporters into his ranks, Harcourt asserted.[2]

Trevelyan accepted Gladstone's invitation and at dinner on 25 May they had a long discussion.[3] Although Gladstone gave him no guarantee of any alteration in policy,[4] Trevelyan shortly afterwards joined his party. Trevelyan publicly emphasised that his views remained unaltered.[5]

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1 The propositions listed were : 1. The continued maintenance of the unqualified supremacy of the Imperial Parliament, and the consequent subordination of any local assemblies which might be hereafter created for the transaction of the purely domestic business of the different parts of the United Kingdom. 2. Retention of the full and continuous representation of Ireland in the Imperial Parliament. 3. Protection of the Protestant minority in Ireland, among other means by the separate treatment of the province of Ulster. 4. The retention by the Imperial Parliament of all powers of legislation and administration necessary to the maintenance of law and order and to the dispensation of justice in Ireland. (Add. Mss. 44201, f. 127).

2 Harcourt to Gladstone, 27 May 1887.

3 Gladstone's memorandum on conversation with Trevelyan, 25 May 1887, Add. Mss. 44773, f. 41.

4 Ibid. Later in October Morley told the Courtneys that he had drawn Gladstone's attention to assertions by Trevelyan that Gladstone had made him concessions and that Gladstone had answered, "I keep myself studiously ignorant of George Trevelyan's pledges." (Kate Courtney's diary, 11 Oct. 1887, Courtney, XXIII).

5 e.g. Trevelyan's speech, Glasgow, 25 July 1887, The Times, 26 July 1887, p. 8.

He defended his action by pointing to Gladstone's statements that he adhered only to the underlying principles of the Government of Ireland Bill and would not insist on the use of imperial credit for Irish land purchase.[1] A factor which may have influenced Trevelyan was the high-handed way in which Chamberlain had treated him - especially in the period following the February meeting of the Round Table Conference.[2] Trevelyan's action was the more embarrassing to himself because of the militancy with which he had opposed Gladstonian home rule ever since Chamberlain and he had resigned their posts in the previous year. It was also exceptionally exasperating to the unionists. Sir Henry James has recorded that their condemnation of him even eclipsed their condemnation of Spencer and Harcourt.[3]

At the National Radical Union conference which met in Birmingham on 1 June Chamberlain stated that recent

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1 e.g. Ibid. Trevelyan's biographer wrote that Trevelyan rejoined Gladstone because of the violence of the upper class against Liberals; the common abuse of the Irish; and the nascent imperialism. (G.M.Trevelyan, Sir George Otto Trevelyan, 121).

2 In a public apologia of his part in the conference, which he made when standing as a Gladstonian candidate in July, Trevelyan stated : ". . . the fact is that during this long space of time [after the Feb. meeting of the conference] an active correspondence was going on between Mr. Chamberlain and Sir William Harcourt - a correspondence of which I did not see a word. . . . The first that I heard of what was going on was on the 9th March. . . . On that evening I met Mr. Chamberlain at an evening party and he told me that he had written a letter. When I came home I found the letter in which he told me that he should not rejoin the Round Table Conference and that if I would call at his house he would show me the correspondence of which that determination was the result . . ." (The Times, 27 July 1887, p. 10).

3 Sir Henry James' memoir, Lord Askwith, Lord James of Hereford, 190.

speeches by Gladstone and his supporters had contained nothing except vague and rhetorical assertions of principles which nobody disputed, and that he agreed with Hartington (who had sent a letter to the conference) that the Gladstonians preferred and had chosen alliance with the Parnellites in preference to reunion. Hence he was forced, he said, to conclude that the cleavage of the Liberal party had become complete and irretrievable. He affirmed that the Liberal Unionists would continue to support the Government as long as the Union was endangered and pointed out that it had offered a programme which, two years earlier, Liberals would have accepted with enthusiasm.[1] The Times commented that the dominant note of the conference was the final recognition that reconciliation was impossible and a plainness in dealing with Gladstone's tergiversations hitherto uncommon with the Liberal Unionists.[2]

Chamberlain, undoubtedly, was turning his face towards new horizons, though perhaps as yet with little enthusiasm. His new attitude appears to have drawn him closer to Churchill. Both men in their speeches began to advocate the creation of a national or central party. Chamberlain had been contemplating something similar for some time. As may be remembered, he had written to Harcourt at the end of February that if the situation were to remain unaltered he

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1 The Times, 2 June 1887, p. 6.

2 Ibid., p. 9.

would "go out of politics altogether - or assist in forming some third party that will strenuously resist the new Programme of Labouchere and Co. while ready to give effect to the older policy of Constructive Liberalism."[1]

Churchill's biographer describes the "National Party" scheme as a vision of a great new party "- free alike from vested interests and from holy formulae, able to deal with national problems on their merits, patient to respect the precious bequests of the past, strong to drive forward the wheels of progress."[2] One feels that any such vision was at most but a part of the explanation. Chamberlain and Churchill were ambitious, practical men, little inclined to launch, without other motives, a crusade for any such mystical ideal. A good down to earth explanation is at hand. Salisbury's government was far from secure and its collapse was a possibility which no politician could ignore. Chamberlain and Churchill not only recognised the possibility, but looked forward to it as they expected that such an event would result in a coalition government under Hartington in which they would hold major positions.[3] To prevent the stigma of being a Fox - North affair, such a coalition required the advance propagation of a raison d'etre and that, one feels, was what Chamberlain and Churchill were in the main

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1 Chamberlain to Harcourt, 26 Feb. 1887. (Quoted above pp. 367-8).

2 Churchill, II. 349.

3 See below pp. 401-2.

endeavouring to do in advocating the "National Party".

Gladstone, in a speech at Swansea on 4 June, aimed at appeasing Harcourt.[1] He listed five basic conditions which he had laid down during the debate on the Government of Ireland Bill[2] and said that he still adhered to them, but that he was willing to see all other aspects of home rule dealt with as good policy and good sense might dictate. The inclusion or exclusion of the Irish members, he intimated, should be dealt with as expediency and the views of the country might determine. He suggested that a settlement of the question should be deferred until home rule had been established and that in the interval the Irish representation in the Imperial Parliament should remain unaltered. Gladstone said he understood that Sir George Trevelyan had suggested a conference between Hartington and him to consider reunion. If Hartington were to indicate a wish for such a conference he would readily respond, he said. He himself could not suggest such a conference, Gladstone explained, because when last he had communicated with Hartington on Irish affairs Hartington had refused to admit that he had ever assented to any form of assembly for the whole

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1 Gladstone wrote to Harcourt on 5 July, ". . . I felt that I had used every effort to fall in with your view in my speech at Swansea, and thought I had all but affirmed in terms your main contention about Irish members at Westminster. (draft, Add. Mss. 44201, f. 140).

2 In his speech, 13 April 1886, Hansard, C. CIV, cols. 1534-50.

of Ireland.[1]

Harcourt may have used Gladstone's statement, luke-warm though it was, to obtain an interview with Hartington a few days later.[2] At this interview Hartington consented to meet Gladstone and said that he was prepared to discuss a home rule measure with him, provided it were of a certain kind.[3] Harcourt's letter to Gladstone three weeks later, which is at present the only source of information for this meeting, does not indicate the nature of the home rule scheme which Hartington was willing to discuss. Harcourt thought well of it and believed that the majority of Liberals would do the same.[4] Presumably, it was a scheme f r a limited form of home rule. Harcourt assumed that Parnell would not consent to it.[5] Afterwards Gladstone, Morley, and Harcourt met and discussed Hartington's remarks.[6] "No violent objection of principle arose", but Gladstone said that he could not meet Hartington without Parnell's consent.[7] As a result it was agreed that Morley should ask Parnell for an interview in order to learn his views.[8]

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1 The Times, 6 June 1887, p. 10.

2 In his letter to Gladstone, 2 July 1887, Harcourt referred to this event as "that discussion which you had initiated". (Add. Mss. 44201, f. 132).

3 Harcourt to Gladstone, 2 July 1887.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

Harcourt believed that he knew what Parnell's views were certain to be and he abandoned his hope of a Gladstone - Hartington meeting.[1] Nevertheless, when day after day passed with no reference to the interview with Parnell[2] Harcourt became more and more furious. At last he gave vent to his views and feelings in a letter to Gladstone on 2 July. Gladstone in his reply made no attempt to debate the issues which Harcourt had raised. He confined himself to pointing out that he had no faith in a scheme of limited home rule such as Harcourt had pressed for after his interview with Hartington. He remarked that through Parnell he had wished to learn Ireland's views on proposals which he disapproved, but did not explain why the interview with Parnell had not taken place.[3]

The Irish Land Bill had a slow passage through the Lords and did not reach the House of Commons until 4 July. The Government consented to certain alterations in the bankruptcy clauses, but when the remodelled clauses were denounced with an equal vigour, it restored them to practically their original form. However, the Liberal Unionists were determined that their objections should be taken into account. To achieve this aim and to prevent

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1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 Gladstone to Harcourt (draft), 5 July 1887, Add. Mss. 44201, f. 140.

irate individual Liberal Unionists from making damaging attacks upon the Government the leaders decided to adopt the course which they had taken with the Criminal Law Amendment Bill. Hartington held a meeting of the Liberal Unionist members at Devonshire House on 8 July and as before a committee was appointed to draft amendments to be pressed on the Government.[1] According to the unauthorised press reports, the meeting also passed a resolution assuring the Government of Liberal Unionist support on at least the second reading of the bill, and came to a tacit understanding that members who should disagree with the committee's amendments would confine their action to abstention from the parliamentary division.[2]

Salisbury admitted the necessity of the Irish Land Bill, but confessed that it was "pain and grief" to him.[3] He strongly opposed any further widening of its scope. The Government adopted Salisbury's view and Balfour in moving the second reading on 11 July intimated that no major alteration of the bill would be accepted.[4] This information precipitated a crisis the gravity of which was not realized by the public at the time.

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1 The committee consisted of Hartington, Chamberlain, Sir H. James, H.B.Finlay, T.W.Russell, T.Lea, Viscount Lymington, and J.W.Barclay. (The Times, 9 July 1887, p. 16).

2 e.g. The Times, 9 July 1887, p. 16.

3 Salisbury to Hicks-Beach, 3 July 1887, quotation, Cecil, IV. 149.

4 Hansard, CCCXVII, cols. 372-89.

The Liberal Unionists, while recognising that the bill in many ways was an admirable one,[1] strongly resented the Government's decision to concede nothing to their views. A deputation from a special Irish Land Bill sub-committee, which had been set up by the Ulster Liberal Unionist Association, was in London pressing the demands of the Irish unionist tenants.[2] On the day following Balfour's introduction of the measure T.M.Russell, the Liberal Unionist representative for South Tyrone, warned that a refusal to allow revision of judicial rents and an insistence upon the "bankruptcy" clauses would undermine the unionism of Ulster.[3] In addition Chamberlain and Churchill were scheming together to replace Salisbury's Government by a Hartington coalition containing themselves.[4] They were so hopeful of such an outcome that they agreed, it appears, that neither would enter a cabinet which did not contain the other.[5] Chamberlain approached Hartington on the possibility of a reconstruction of the Government. Hartington in his reply did not express hostility to the idea but urged the

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1 e.g. Chamberlain told the Commons, "It is generous to a degree that no previous measure has been, and . . . goes further in the concessions which it makes than any government has ever gone, whether Tory or Liberal." (Hansard, CCCXVII, col. 425). His description of the bill as "really generous" in a letter to Rev. R.W.Dale (Garvin, II. 306) indicates that his Commons description was an honest opinion.

2 Northern Whig, 9 July 1887, p. 5.

3 Hansard, CCCXVII, cols. 539-48.

4 Garvin, II. 433-4; and Churchill, II. 345.

5 Churchill, II. 345.

inexpediency of an immediate one. He wrote:

> As to a reconstruction of the Government, if it should be suggested, I hope you will consider the immense practical difficulties at this time. The suspension of business at this period of the Session, and a number of us sent down to our constituencies to fight for our lives; and the Conservatives puzzled and perplexed at a crisis they don't in the least anticipate or understand the necessity for; all this is not a pleasant prospect. Surely it is better, if it is at all possible, to keep the present Government in this session, and let a reconstruction come, if it is to come, with more deliberation and time to construct a definite and popular policy.[1]

Faced by the united front of the Liberal Unionists, the outcry of the Irish unionist tenants, and the opposition of Churchill the ministers drawn from the Commons declared themselves beaten.[2] Salisbury gave way to their views and decided to concede all the main Liberal Unionist demands. "It is the price which we have to pay for the Union and it is a heavy one," was his growling comment to his family.[3] He called the Conservative members and certain peers to a meeting at the Carlton Club on the 19th and bluntly told them of his decision.[4] From the press reports it appears that Salisbury said that the Government had been prepared to give way on the less important aspects of the Irish Land Bill, among which it included the bankruptcy clauses, but not on

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1 Hartington to Chamberlain, 13 July 1887, Garvin, II. 434.

2 Cecil, IV. 150.

3 Ibid.

4 The press had to rely on second-hand accounts of the speech as reporters were not admitted to the meeting. (The Times, 20 July 1887, p. 9). Salisbury's biographer wrote that they were admitted (Cecil, IV, 150), but she was mistaken.

the revision of judicial rents as Conservative principles were opposed to the upsetting of contracts. He explained that, nevertheless, the Government in order to avoid the general election which must follow the withdrawal of Liberal Unionist support now proposed to concede the revision of judicial rents also.

The committee appointed at the Devonshire House meeting met later on the same day. It pronounced Salisbury's concessions to be satisfactory, and assured the Government of Liberal Unionist co-operation in dealing with the remaining business of the session.[1 & 2] As the committee contained Hartington, Chamberlain, and James the Government was thus assured that at least on the Irish Land Bill its existence was no longer endangered.

The Conservatives on the whole accepted Salisbury's logic and acquiesced in the surrender, although, of course, not without many a surly complaint in private. The Standard wrote that it would leave to metaphysicians to argue whether the concessions were equivalent to a fresh valuation of rents. It was enough, it maintained, for practical

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1 The Times, 20 July 1887, p. 7.

2 T.W.Russell (S.Tyrone) was satisfied with the Government's concessions, but in the following month he withdrew from the Liberal Unionist party as a protest against its acquiescence in the acceptance by the Government of two amendments to the land bill. (T.W.Russell to the editor of The Times, 20 Aug. 1887, The Times, 22 Aug. 1887, p. 8).

politicians to know that the Government made their proposals with the support of their followers, that the proposals met the wishes of the Liberal Unionists, and that there was every reason to believe that they would satisfy the Ulster tenants and landlords. Hostages had been given to the Irish tenants, it argued, in the shape of previous legislation and the path so taken would have to be followed until it should emerge in single ownership.[1] The Times thought that the Government had probably been influenced to make the concessions more by the wish to do nothing which would weaken the position of the Liberal Unionists, and with it the value of their alliance, than by the fear that the Liberal Unionists would desert them.[2] The Daily Telegraph wrote that the Liberal Unionists had loyally supported the "coercion" bill - a most disagreeable necessity for most of them - and that their demand that the legislation of the year should have a Liberal stamp was not asking too much in return.[3] The Spectator declared that the only one who had gained by the surrender was Parnell and blamed the Government for not having made the concession at the time of Parnell's Tenants Relief Bill, or when the Cowper Commission had reported. It was no secret, it stated, that the prime

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1 Standard, 20 July 1887, p. 4.

2 The Times, 20 July 1887, p. 7.

3 Daily Telegraph, 20 July 1887, p. 5.

mover in the Liberal Unionist pressure on the Government had not been Hartington, and it doubted whether the concessions were in keeping with Hartington's convictions.[1] The Birmingham Daily Post drew the moral that the Government would only go so far as it was firmly led by the Liberal Unionists.[2] The Daily News commented that the Cabinet had evidently decided that the retention of office was the better part of valour, and that Lord Hartington's support was worth more than Mr. Goschen's arguments.[3]

Not until the end of July could anyone be certain that Salisbury's Irish Land Bill surrender had saved the Government. A week after his speech it again seemed on the verge of collapse and even Hartington feared that no propping could uphold it.[4] However, disaster was once more averted and by early August the Government was safe for at least the immediate future.

Chamberlain had been elated at the prospect of an immediate coalition[5] and must have been keenly disappointed when it receded into an indefinite future. He had also to give over his hope of a political partnership with Churchill.

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1 Spectator, 23 July 1887, p. 986.

2 Birmingham Daily Post, 21 July 1887, p. 4.

3 Daily News, 20 July 1887, p. 4.

4 Garvin, II. 434.

5 Ibid.

The expectation of a Government collapse had drawn them closer together than ever before. It may also have made them more aware of the obstacles of temperament and personality which stood in the way of a partnership. Both men were too self-willed to concede much to the views of the other. Churchill was temperamental, his actions unpredictable, and often in his speeches he seemed careless of whether or not he damaged the unionist cause. As Chamberlain noted a few years later, "He was ready to press the Government in a Liberal direction, but unfortunately . . . he was willing to do this in a way and to an extent which might seriously weaken them."[1]. In the Commons on 1 August an amendment on the Irish Land Bill led to a clash in which Churchill struck at Chamberlain with the phrase "a characteristic sneer" and Chamberlain retaliated with the remark that he was not one who spoke one way and voted another.[2] The quarrel was soon made up and within the week they were dining and consulting together in what appeared to be the same friendly way as before.[3] But either the reconciliation was incomplete or else the quarrel was a symptom that they themselves sensed their political incompatability. Soon afterwards Chamberlain and Churchill had a frank discussion during a walk in Hyde Park and

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1 Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 279.

2 Hansard, CCCXVIII, cols. 828-9.

3 Churchill, II. 348.

"decided by mutual consent to work independently and to pursue the objects they sought in common by separate paths."[1] From that time onwards Churchill began to look more and more to Hartington in political matters and to confide less freely in Chamberlain.[2]

Hartington believed that events were moving towards a coalition and that Conservative and Liberal Unionist opinion were now for the first time almost prepared for it.[3] He visualised a coalition which would be equally acceptable to the majority of Conservatives and Liberal Unionists, and which would be substantially agreed on non-Irish as well as on Irish policy.[4] His views on coalition probably differed from those of Chamberlain and Churchill. One suspects that the latter wished for a coalition in which theirs would be the predominant influence. Many right wing Conservatives, and probably Salisbury, would have declined to serve in such a ministry.

In a speech on 5 August Hartington said that a union of Conservatives and Liberal Unionists would be the perfect form of organisation, but that it would have to be preceded by further experience of the willingness of both sides to co-operate in Liberal legislation. He declared that he had

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1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 Hartington to Goldwin Smith, 7 Aug. 1887, Goldwin Smith's correspondence (ed., A.Haultain), 202.

4 Hartington's speech, 5 Aug. 1887, The Times, 6 Aug. 1887, p. 10.

no hope of an agreement between Liberal Unionists and Gladstonians. An agreement, he said, would now have to be an inter-party one and include the Conservatives - a suggestion which he had made on several occasions in the preceding weeks. The only statement of Gladstone which he could consider a concession was the admission that a land bill could be framed without imperial credit. He explained that to him the retention of the Irish members at Westminster would be an aggravation and not an improvement in the Government of Ireland Bill, and that separate treatment of Ulster must involve a reconstruction of the whole scheme such as Gladstone did not appear to have recognized.[1]

Whatever prestige may have accrued to the Liberal Unionists through having gained the alterations which they had demanded in the Irish Land Bill was more than offset by the success of the Gladstonians at the by-elections. Between 1 July and 2 August six by-elections had been fought in constituencies which had been contested in the general election. The result had been that the Gladstonians had captured two seats from the Conservatives, held two of their own with increased majorities, and reduced the Conservative majority in the remaining two.[2] Although no

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[1] The Times, 6 Aug. 1887, p. 10.

[2] The Northwich (Cheshire) by-election (13 Aug.) is not included because Chamberlain had made his approach to Gladstone before the result of it was known. The Liberal Unionists who had won Northwich by 456 votes in the general election lost it by 1,129 votes. In both contests the Liberal Unionist candidate was a moderate. In the general election he was a local salt mining magnate and in the by-election Lord Richard Grosvenor.

Liberal Unionist stood in any of these contests, the Gladstonian successes were more damaging to the Liberal Unionists than to the Conservatives for it was widely suspected that the explanation was that many Liberal Unionists, and especially the radically inclined, were returning to Gladstone.[1] The Liberal Unionists had to recognise that there was some truth in this and that it augered ill for the future of the party.

Apart from the by-elections early August was a singularly gloomy time for Chamberlain. His hopes of an immediate coalition and of a partnership with Churchill had evaporated and, as was to be expected, he had no liking for Hartington's desire to close ranks with the Conservatives. Such a course, he warned Hartington, was negative and certain to lead in the long run to the extinction of

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[1] Another factor which told against the unionists in these by-elections was the exceptional abilities of the Gladstonian organisers, Francis Schnadhorst and Francis Adams. On 2 Sept. Arnold Morley warned Gladstone that the by-election victories had been due in part to superior organisation, and that similar success could not be expected in a general election. (Add. Mss. 44253, f. 126). Both politicians and electors in the latter nineteenth century attached a greater importance to by-elections than they do now. Prominent statesmen took part in them to an extent unknown today, and unlike modern by-elections the poll was invariably higher than in a general election. Party organisation continued to increase in scale and efficiency during the second half of the eighties and by-elections were fought with an increasing intensity. In the Exchange Div., Liverpool by-election of Jan. 1887 (in which Goschen was defeated by 7 votes) some 700 voters who had taken up residence elsewhere were brought back by the Gladstonians to vote. (Told to Sir R. Temple by T.P.O'Connor, Sir R. Temple, Letters and character sketches from the House of Commons, 199). No less than 260 members of Parliament, electioneering agents, and others were brought into the constituency by the two parties during the by-election for the Isle of Thanet in June 1889. (Speech by Wolmer, Liberal Unionist conference, Leeds, Nov. 1889, Liberal Unionist, Dec. 1889, p. 92).

the Liberal Unionists as a party.[1] Then in the second week of August he learned that the Government had decided to suppress the Irish National League by proclamation. He was much disturbed. It was, he told Hartington, a suicidal policy and one to which he could give no support.[2] "Why not", he asked, "trust rather to the beneficent operation of the Land Bill?"[3]

These embarrassments, and especially the decision to suppress the National League, appear to have been more than Chamberlain could tolerate and, as was his instinct when hard pressed, he sketched out a new offensive. His plan was that the Liberal Unionist party should officially adopt a substantial and distinct programme, including his own "Canadian province" scheme of home rule, and, secondly, that a renewed effort should be made to come to an understanding with Gladstone.[4]

One is surprised by Chamberlain's advocacy of a new approach to Gladstone. Was he appalled by the gloomy outlook for the Radical Unionists and merely clutching at the only straw within reach? Some men might have reacted in that way, but one feels confident that Chamberlain was

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1 Chamberlain to Hartington, 16 Aug. 1887, Garvin, II. 315-16, and 22 Sept. 1887, Holland, II. 195-6.

2 Chamberlain to Hartington, 11 Aug. 1887, q.w.o., Garvin, II. 308-9.

3 Ibid.

4 Hartington to Chamberlain, 15 Aug. 1887, Holland, II. 193-4; and Chamberlain to Hartington, 16 Aug. 1887.

not such a person. He himself explains in his memoir that Gladstone had in a speech indicated his willingness to make concessions to the Liberal Unionists.[1] This supposed willingness appears to have been Chamberlain's main argument when pressing the proposal upon Hartington.[2] But in none of his speeches during the preceding weeks had Gladstone made any concession of significance which he had not already made prior to June and which consequently had been denounced by Chamberlain as inadequate at the National Radical Union conference. However, Gladstone had in one or two speeches advocated home rule for Wales, and Scotland. This fact and Gladstone's explicit statements that an Irish or other legislature must be subject to the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament, may have led Chamberlain to wonder whether Gladstone could be induced to adopt a Canadian type scheme for the whole of the British Isles - a plan which, as has been seen, Chamberlain had long approved.

Whatever may have been his motives, Chamberlain acted at once. In a conversation with Morley on the evening of 12 August[3] he suggested "communications" in a further endeavour to discover a scheme of Liberal reunion.[4] Morley

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1 Chamberlain's memoir, Chamberlain, 271.

2 Hartington to Chamberlain, 15 Aug. 1887.

3 Garvin, II. 310.

4 Morley to Gladstone, 21 Aug. 1887, Add. Mss. 44255, f. 217; and Morley to Chamberlain, 14 Aug. 1887, Garvin, II. 311-12.

eagerly grasped at the suggestion and next day travelled to Hawarden Castle to discuss it with Gladstone.[1] There he found that Gladstone, although friendly to reconciliation, doubted the expediency of immediate "communications".[2] Events, he suggested, should be allowed to ripen further and added that the hostility to Chamberlain among the Gladstonians meant that any move would have to be a gradual one. He made clear that he was interested, not in a reconciliation with Chamberlain alone, but in one which would include the whole of the Liberal Unionist party. ". . . he dreads any step", Morley reported, "which might in some degree commit him to what might prove only sectional accommodation."

Chamberlain replied to Morley on the 16th. By then he had learned from Hartington that it was futile to hope for his co-operation in any immediate negotiations,[3] and he must have recognised from Morley's report that without Hartington's co-operation any further approach to Gladstone would be worse than useless. He informed Morley that he was quite ready to accept the view that they should wait until events ripened or at least until Morley should have returned from a holiday in Switzerland in three or four weeks time.[4]

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1 Morley to Chamberlain, 12 Aug. 1887, Garvin, II. 311.

2 This description of the visit is based on Morley to Chamberlain, 14 Aug. 1887; and Morley to Gladstone, 21 Aug. 1887.

3 Hartington to Chamberlain, 15 Aug. 1887, Holland, II. 193-4.

4 Chamberlain to Morley, 16 Aug. 1887, Garvin, II. 313.

Meanwhile Chamberlain had urged his proposals on Hartington. On the 14th Hartington discussed them with Churchill. Churchill told him that he believed the Conservative party would not consider any plan which went beyond an extension of local government to the three kingdoms, and that if the Liberal Unionists were to adopt a scheme for Ireland modelled on the Canadian constitution the alliance with the Conservatives and all hope of a coalition or of a national party would be at an end.[1] Next day Hartington wrote reporting the conversation to Chamberlain. He added that as Churchill was "at least as advanced as any of the Conservatives" the probable result of an adoption of Chamberlain's plan would be to break up the alliance with the Conservatives; to make a reconstruction of the Government impossible; and to place the Liberal Unionists in a position where they would have the support of neither Liberals nor Conservatives and so would disappear.[2] And as to Gladstone's supposed concessions - surely they could criticise and examine them and draw him into more explicit declarations before committing themselves further! However :

> If you still decide on treating Mr. Gladstone's concessions as substantial and as providing a basis for an understanding, I fear that it may be as you have suggested, the commencement of a separation in our lines of action. But I do not know that the risk of this is greater than it was at the time of the round table, and I doubt whether anything which I could

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1 Hartington to Chamberlain, 15 Aug. 1887.

2 Ibid.

> honestly say at this time would certainly avert it. If I could promise a favourable consideration to some plan which should be intended to satisfy my conditions, it would not carry us much further, for I should do so with the knowledge that the plan when produced would not differ very much from the one which I have seen,[1] to which I do not think that I could agree, and for which I could not take any responsibility; and we should before long find ourselves drifting apart.. . .

Hartington's arguments were reinforced by appeals to Chamberlain from Sir Henry James and other Liberal Unionists.[2] Chamberlain yielded and consented to postpone public advocacy of his proposed new departure.[3]

The Irish National League was proclaimed in Clare, and in parts of Galway, Kerry, Cork, and Waterford on 19 August. Next day Chamberlain announced that he would vote against the Government when the matter should come before Parliament.[4] Hartington thought the proclamation "open to every sort of Parliamentary and political objection", but confined himself to informing the Government of his opinion as he assumed that it had taken the decision on better information than he possessed.[5] The Government had not consulted him beforehand as they had done on other subjects.[6]

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1 Perhaps the Canadian province type scheme which Chamberlain had shown Hartington in March. (See above p. 369).

2 Garvin, II. 315.

3 Chamberlain to Hartington, 16 Aug. 1887, Garvin, II. 315-16.

4 The Times, 22 Aug. 1887, p. 7.

5 Hartington to Churchill, 21 Aug. 1887, Churchill, II. 350-1.

6 Ibid.

It seems to have felt, he told Churchill, that it was a measure of executive responsibility rather than of policy and had abstained from asking him to share executive responsibility.[1] Churchill, too, was against the proclamation. On the 22nd he wrote to Chamberlain that if the whole of the Liberal Unionist party were to vote against it he would go with them, but that otherwise he would give a silent vote in its favour.[2]

On the 24th Gladstone brought forward a condemnatory address. Hartington spoke in favour of the Government on the last day of the debate (26 August). He contended that the National League could not be judged entirely on its professed aims and that account had to be taken of its influence on peace and order in Ireland. He admitted that he had pointed out to the Government objections to the proclamation and had suggested the use, if possible, of certain other provisions of the Criminal Law Amendment Act. But the Government, he said, was bound to act on its own judgment.[3]

The Government had a majority of seventy-seven in the division. Forty-seven Liberal Unionists, including Hartington and Bright, voted with the Government, six against it, and seventeen were absent unpaired. The six consisted of

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1 Ibid.

2 Churchill to Chamberlain, 22 Aug. 1887, q.w.o., Garvin, II. 314-15.

3 Hansard, CCCXX, cols. 88-101.

Chamberlain and his five staunchest followers - his brother Richard, his brother-in-law William Kenrick, Jesse Collings, Power Williams, and Sir B. Hingley. The Conservatives naturally were irritated by Chamberlain's action, but many of them recognised that he was being consistent with his previous attitude. W.H. Smith in reporting the debate to the Queen wrote :

> . . . Lord Hartington has acted throughout most honourably in every sense of the word, and has given evidence of his most earnest desire to do the best in his power for the country irrespective of personal interests; and Mr. Chamberlain also, as far as he could, has thrown aside all petty and party feeling . . .[1]

Chamberlain's vote may have been decisive in a way in which he could not have expected. On the same day as he cast it the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States agreed to attempt a settlement of the long standing fishing rights dispute between Canada and the United States by means of a joint commission. The Government was at once faced with the problem of whom to place in charge of the British side of the commission. Someone suggested Chamberlain and immediately the idea was recognised as an excellent one.[2] He was a man of outstanding ability, his appointment would be a mark of respect to the Liberal Unionists, and the removal for some months of their militant and conditionally would

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[1] W.H. Smith to the Queen, 27 Aug. 1887, Letters of Queen Victoria, 3rd Series, I. 346-7.

[2] Garvin, II. 324.

be a relief to the Government. To Chamberlain, who just then was at the nadir of his political weakness and isolation, the prospect of leaving Britain may have come with even greater satisfaction than it did to the Government.[1] At any rate he accepted their offer at once[2] and the matter was settled two days later (28th) by a telegram from the Queen to Salisbury stating that she highly approved.[3]

Behind the scenes Chamberlain continued to press hard to have his new programme adopted by the party. It was a single-handed struggle for on this question he lacked the support of any important Liberal Unionist and had Churchill against him.[4] Towards the end of August Hartington informed Goschen of Chamberlain's proposals and asked Goschen and Salisbury to consider whether home rule could be resisted permanently without the unionists offering an alternative

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1 On 22 April 1888 Chamberlain wrote to Miss Endicott, "I pressed him [Hartington] to do something of this sort [adopt a positive programme] before I left for America, and if he had done so I should not have gone, but should have remained to advocate it." (Garvin, II. 352).

2 Garvin, II. 324-5.

3 The Queen to Salisbury [cypher telegram], 28 Aug. 1887, Letters of Queen Victoria, 3rd Series, I. 347.

4 On 22 Aug. Churchill wrote to Chamberlain : "The conduct of the Government on the Land question and on the League question is imbecile enough . . . Every day that they remain in office strengthens Mr. G.'s hands. But you and I can do nothing by ourselves. I think we must stick to Lord H. coûte que coûte.. . . His position is most difficult, but his shrewd caution and masterly inactivity will probably carry him and his following through." (Garvin, II. 314-5).

scheme involving more than an extension of local government.[1] Hartington explained that his own belief was that Liberal Unionists would be at a great disadvantage if it should seem that their opposition was to the details of a particular scheme and not to the broad principles of Gladstone's policy.[2] There is no record available of what Goschen or Salisbury thought, but one can assume that they liked Chamberlain's proposals no more than did Hartington.

During the greater part of September Chamberlain continued to press for the adoption of his programme. At last, either as a tactful gesture, or in order to prove to Chamberlain how small a welcome his programme would have from the party as a whole, Hartington asked Craig Sellar to obtain from a number of Liberal Unionists their opinions "on what ought to be the policy of the [Liberal] Unionist party, and especially on the question of our proposing a scheme of Home Rule or extensive Local Government."[3] On 21 September Hartington forwarded Craig Sellar's replies (with the exception of six which were still to come in) to Chamberlain and pointed out that all were against any form of Irish parliament, or large scheme of local government. He also gave his own opinion :

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1 Elliot, II. 114-15.

2 Ibid.

3 Hartington to Chamberlain, 21 Sept. 1887, Holland, II. 194-5.

> . . . I feel more and more convinced that the production of any alternative plan will break up the Liberal Unionist party, or what remains of it, immediately. There are, no doubt, a certain number whose objections were to the details of the Gladstonian scheme. Mr. Gladstone has probably indicated sufficient openness of mind to conciliate them, and they would prefer such a modification of his plan as he would himself propose, to anything which we could offer as an alternative. But the principle of the large majority of Liberal Unionists is, I think, opposition to an Irish Parliament in any shape and then we shall lose by any approach to Mr. Gladstone.[1]

The answers to Craig Sellar's enquiries seem to have completed the task of convincing Chamberlain of the futility of further pressing to have his views made those of the party. He replied to Hartington on the same day as he received his letter. First he objected that the men consulted by Craig Sellar were bad advisers for a popular party and that even the Ulstermen, Lea and Russell, ignored the English electorate. He then continued :

> . . . However, I do not wish to press this now. I decided after my last conversation with you not to put any alternative scheme forward at the present time in opposition to your wish, and I certainly shall not say anything in my coming speeches more definite than the general allusions I have previously made.
>
> At the same time it is right that I should privately record my dissent from the policy which you have finally adopted. It is a negative policy, and, while it may do very well for the Conservatives, it will not retain any considerable number of Liberal or Radical Unionists in the country. Unless something turns up we are certain to be extinguished at the next election, and it is impossible to say how soon that election may come. If you are ready to support the Government through thick and thin, and whether they accept your advice or not, they may retain office for a few years, but the smash will be

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[1] Ibid.

all the worse when it does come.[1]

Thus Chamberlain, in spite of his protests, conceded that for "the present" Hartington's ideas and not his own were to be the ones followed by the party.

He also put aside his last real hopes of reconciliation with Gladstone. On 15 September he wrote to Morley that the situation seemed more hopeless than ever and that Gladstone's most recent speeches and published letters seemed a withdrawal from rather than an advance towards conciliation.[2] Morley replied in a friendly letter holding open the door for further developments. He remarked that he thought the difficulties were, at bottom, mainly personal.[3] Chamberlain wrote back :

> I do not think that the difficulties are personal. If an agreement could be found that would settle the question, I would undertake to go out of politics altogether as my part of the bargain. But I am bound both by honour and duty to fight to the death against proposals which in my judgment constitute the greatest national danger with which we have ever been threatened.[4]

With this blunt note Chamberlain appears to have finally turned his back on Liberal reunion.

The employment of the powers granted under the Criminal Law Amendment Act led to incidents which were as useful to home rulers as the "Parnellism and Crime" articles and the

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1 Chamberlain to Hartington, 22 Sept. 1887, Chats. 340.2149 (Holland, II. 196).

2 Chamberlain to Morley, 18 Sept. 1887, Garvin, II. 319.

3 Morley to Chamberlain, 21 Sept. 1887, ibid.

4 Chamberlain to Morley, 22 Sept. 1887, ibid., II. 319-20.

facsimile letter were to unionists. Many Irish nationalists were convicted and imprisoned for defying the Government prohibitions, but the most dramatic incident occurred at Mitchelstown, Co. Cork on 9 September during a large protest meeting at which Dillon and a few radical Gladstonian members of Parliament were the speakers. After a clash with the police the mob drove them into their barracks from which the police fired a volley that killed two people and injured others.

Parliament did not rise until 16 September owing to the amount of time which had been taken up by the two Irish bills. The recess saw political campaigning of an unusual intensity. Unionists were goaded on by the adverse bye-elections of the previous months. A general election in the near future was sufficiently probable to give an additional stimulus to everyone. The Liberal Unionists were especially active and the Annual Register speaks of their "almost feverish energy".[1] A fortnight before he left for North America Chamberlain made a five day tour through Ulster and met with an enthusiasm similar to that of Churchill's visit in February 1886.[2] On his return he exclaimed to Hartington, "Do not forget Ulster - it is a terrible nut for the G.O.M. to crack".[3] Towards the end of

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1 Annual Register, 1887, p. 156.

2 Northern Whig, 12 - 17 Oct. 1887, passim.

3 Chamberlain to Hartington, 27 Oct. 1887, Chats. 340. 2152.

November Hartington accompanied by Goschen addressed a large gathering of Liberal Unionists in Dublin[1] - a gathering which impressed by the evidence it gave of the strength of Liberal Unionism among the wealthier non-landlord people of southern Ireland.

The annual conference of the National Liberal Federation took place in Nottingham on 18, and 19 October. Gladstone in his address on the 19th gave his consent to a major step forward in the radicalization of the party programme. He in effect sanctioned local government, including county councils, the readjustment of rates so that labour would have to pay no more than a fair share, local option, abolition of landed entail ("free trade in land"), disestablishment in Wales and Scotland, and abolition of plural votes ("one man, one vote"). Disestablishment of the Church of England he side-stepped with the claim that the question was not yet ripe for decision.[2]

Other factors were helping to solidify the Liberal cleavage besides the increasing divergence in the party programmes. One was the difficulty which Gladstonians and Liberal Unionists had in tolerating one another when they attempted to co-operate for a common end. In the early spring of 1887 Chamberlain and a number of his supporters resigned from the Liberation Society as a result of hostile statements

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1 The Times, 30 Nov., and 1 Dec. 1887.

2 Ibid., 20 Oct. 1887.

about Chamberlain and Bright at one of its meetings.[1] The Temperance Alliance meeting on 1 July hissed the Liberal Unionists, W.S.Caine and E.Russell, until both men were forced to withdraw from the platform.[2] Sir Wilfred Lawson, the president of the Temperance Alliance, denounced such conduct,[3] and the Liberation Society in its winter programme urged its members to exclude the Irish question from their proceedings.[4] But events continued much as before. W.S. Caine rejoined Gladstone in the summer of 1890 because he cared more for temperance reform than for preventing home rule and could not stand being howled and hooted every time he addressed a temperance meeting.[5]

The annual conference of the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations, which met in Oxford on 22, and 23 November caused a flutter of consternation among Liberal Unionists by passing, with a large majority, a

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1 British Weekly, 18 March 1887, p. 9.

2 Ibid., 8 July 1887, p. 153.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., 30 Sept. 1887, p. 467.

5 W.S.Caine told James towards the end of 1889 that he would probably rejoin Gladstone and gave this as his reason. (James' memoir, Lord Askwith, Lord James of Hereford, 190). The immediate cause of Caine's reversion was the Government's abandonment of the licensing clauses of a Local Taxation Bill.

resolution, approving the imposition of protective tariffs.[1 & 2] Salisbury, when later he addressed the conference, endeavoured to allay apprehensions. The question, he said, was for the present of no more than academic interest. But Liberal Unionists were not fully reassured. The Birmingham Daily Post wrote that Salisbury would have to oppose protection clearly and unreservedly. Gladstone's home rule, it warned, would be infinitely less disastrous to the national prosperity than protection.[3] The Scotsman drew the moral that the Liberal Unionists must keep up their own party organisation as the Conservatives would be almost certain in the course of time to adopt some policy opposed by the Liberal Unionists.[4]

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1 The Times, 23, and 24 Nov. 1887.

2 The Gladstonians, of course, were gratified by the Liberal Unionist embarrassment. Harcourt wrote to Spencer, "The declaration of the Tories at Oxford in favour of protection is delightful and we ought to make a great handle out of it. Fancy Goschen, Bright and Chamberlain marching under the Protectionist flag, headed by Howard Vincent!" (23 Nov. 1887, Harcourt vol., Althorp).

3 Birmingham Daily Post, 24 Nov. 1887, p. 4.

4 Scotsman, 24 Nov. 1887, p. 4.

The parliamentary recess which occupied the later part of 1887 can be considered the end of a phase in the history of the Liberal Unionist party. For that reason it is chosen as the terminating point of this thesis. Prior to the recess there was still a possibility, even if only a very slight one, that a section of Liberal Unionists might yet return to Gladstone. From the recess onwards such a possibility was very remote indeed. The failure of the Round Table Conference and the other attempted rapprochements; the liberalism of the Government policy; the increasing radicalism of the Gladstonian; and the fact that the Liberal Unionists had not only supported the Government for a year and a half, but had supported them in passing the Irish Criminal Law Amendment Act all contributed towards the new situation. On his return from North America (9 March 1888) Chamberlain was to create a Liberal Unionist party machine in Birmingham to replace "The Two Thousand" (which the Gladstonians captured during his absence) and to use it shortly afterwards to support the Conservative candidate in a municipal by-election.[1]

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[1] Garvin, II. chap. XXXVII, passim.

# APPENDIX I

## FREE CHURCH MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT, JUNE 1886

The following lists of Free Church M.P.s were gleaned from the religious press. It has not been possible to compile a list of Congregational M.P.s because the Nonconformist and Independent was not interested in discovering which of the M.P.s were of its denomination. The number of Unitarians and Quakers in Parliament was many times larger than the size of their denominations would lead one to expect. (e.g. If M.P.s had been returned according to the numerical strengths of the denominations, Methodist M.P.s would have outnumbered Unitarian by more than twenty-five to one). The comparatively large number of Unitarian and Quaker M.P.s was probably largely because these two denominations contained exceptionally high proportions of the upper middle class. Nineteenth century census returns did not include figures for religious denominations, but the Christian Life believed that Methodists had 699,374 full church members in England and Wales; Congregationalists, 418,100; Baptists, 310,818; and Quakers, 15,219.[1] The Christian Life did not include a figure for Unitarians. Unitarians, including four congregations in Scotland, today number 26,000 full church members.[2]

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1 Christian Life, 3 July 1886, p.321.

2 World Christian Handbook, 1952, p.129. This source is used and not the census returns as the census figure includes more than full church members.

UNITARIANS

Gladstonians (Total 21).

Ashton (T.Gair) Hyde Div., Cheshire

Brocklehurst (W.C.) Macclesfield Div., Cheshire.

Brunner (J.T.) Northwich Div., Cheshire.

Carbutt (E.H.) Monmouth Dist.

Cobb (H.P.) S.E.Warwickshire or Rugby Div.

Cosham (Handel) E. Div., Bristol.

Cowan (Joseph) Newcastle-on-Tyne.

Crompton (C.) Leek Div., Staffordshire.

Hunter (W.A.) N.Div., Aberdeen.

Jacoby (J.A.) Mid. Div., Derbyshire.

James (C.H.) Merthyr-Tydvil.

Kenny (Courtney Stanhope) Barnsley Div., Yorkshire.

Paget (T.T.) Harborough, Leicestershire.

Peacock (Richard) S.E.Gorton, Lancashire.

Potter (T.B.) Rochdale.

Rathbone (William) Carnarvonshire.

Roscoe (Sir H.E.) S. Div., Manchester.

Samuelson (Sir Bernard) Banbury Div., Oxfordshire.

Stansfeld (James) Halifax.

Williams (Arthur John) S. Glamorganshire.

Wright (Caleb) Leigh Div., Lancashire.

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Channing (F.A.) E. Div., Northamptonshire was the son of a Unitarian minister, but he withdrew from that denomination and joined the Anglican.

Liberal Unionist (Total 4)

Chamberlain (Joseph) W. Div., Birmingham.

Chamberlain (Richard) W. Div., Islington.

Kenrick (Alderman W.) N. Div., Birmingham.

Taylor (F.) S. Div., Norfolk.

Conservative

None.

METHODIST

Gladstonian (Total 16)

Arch (Joseph)(Primitive) N.W.Norfolk.

Bennett (J.)(Wesleyan) Gainsborough, Lincolnshire.

Broadhurst (H.)(Wesleyan) Bordesley Div. Birmingham.

Cozens-Hardy (H.H.) (Free Methodist) N. Norfolk.

Crawford (W.) (Primitive) Mid Durham.

Fenwick (C.)(Primitive) Wansbeck, Northumberland.

Fowler (H.H.)(Wesleyan) E. Wolverhampton.

Holden (A.)(Wesleyan) E. Bradford.

Holden (I.)(Wesleyan) N. Keighley, Yorkshire.

Hoyle (I.)(Wesleyan) Heywood, Lancashire.

Jenkins (D.J.)(Wesleyan) Penrith and Falmouth.

McArthur (A.)(Wesleyan) Leicester.

Moulton (J.F.)(Wesleyan) Clapham.

Robson (W.S.)(Wesleyan) Bow and Bromley.

Watson (T.)(Free Methodist) Ilkeston, Derbyshire.

Wilson (J.)(Primitive) Houghton-le-Spring, Durham.

Burt (T.) Morpeth, was the son of a Methodist preacher, but he withdrew from that denomination and was for a time associated with the Unitarians. In 1886 he appears to have been attached to no denomination.

Liberal Unionist (Total 2)

Allen (W.S.)(Wesleyan) Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Bickford-Smith (W.)(Wesleyan) Truro, Cornwall.

Non-Committed Liberal (Total 1)

Blades (J.W.)(Wesleyan) W. Bromwich (walked out before the division on the home rule bill and did not re-stand for Parliament.)

Conservative (Total 2)

De Cobain (E.S.W.)(Primitive) E. Belfast.

Hughes (E.)(Wesleyan) Woolwich.

Nationalist (Total 1)

Jordan (J.)(Wesleyan) W. Clare.

BAPTIST

Gladstonian (Total 6)

Blake (T.) Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire.

Coleman (J.J.) Norwich.

Coote (T.) S. Huntingtonshire.

Davies (W.) Pembrokeshire.

Everett (R.L.) Woodbridge, Suffolk.

Illingworth (A.) W. Bradford.

Liberal Unionist (Total 1)

Caine (W.S.) Tottenham, Middlesex.

Conservative

None.

QUAKER

Gladstonian (Total 3)

Fry (Theodore) Darlington.

Pease (A.E.) York.

Pease (Sir Joseph W.) Barnard Castle, Durham.

Liberal Unionist (Total 3)

Bright (John) Central Birmingham.

Fry (Lewis) N. Bristol.

Leatham (E.A.) Huddersfield.

Conservative

None.

# B I B L I O G R A P H Y

SYNOPSIS

A. Collections of private papers.

B. Autobiographies, diaries, printed correspondence and collected speeches.

C. Biographies and character studies.

D. Contemporary newspapers and periodicals.

E. Contemporary polemical publications.

F. General histories.

G. Other works.

H. Works of reference.

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The biographical notes in this bibliography ignore the person's career after 1892 (e.g. Milner's part in organising the Liberal Unionist Association is noted but not his career in South Africa); there are none for better known persons (e.g. Sir William Harcourt or Sir Michael Hicks Beach); and the same person is dealt with at only one point in the bibliography.

Articles in the following periodicals are not listed : Economic History Review, English Historical Review, History, Irish Historical Studies, Journal of Modern History, and Transactions of the Royal Historical Society.

The place of publication is given only when other than London.

## A. COLLECTIONS OF PRIVATE PAPERS

John Bright papers, British Museum.

Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman papers, British Museum.

Fourth Earl Carnarvon papers, Public Record Office.

Leonard and Kate Courtney (first Baron and Lady Courtney of Penwith) papers, London School of Economics.

Eighth Duke of Devonshire papers, Chatsworth House, Derbyshire.

Sir Charles Dilke papers, British Museum.

Mrs. Mary Drew (daughter of Gladstone) papers, British Museum.

Herbert Gladstone (first Viscount Gladstone of Hawarden) papers, British Museum.

William Ewart Gladstone papers, British Museum.

Second Earl Granville papers, Public Record Office.

First Earl Iddesleigh papers, temporarily deposited in the Public Record Office for the convenience of the Historical Manuscripts Commission.

Sir Henry Ponsonby papers, British Museum.

First Marquess of Ripon papers, British Museum.

Fifth Earl Spencer papers, Althorp, Northamptonshire.

Sir Richard Temple (Conservative M.P.) papers, British Museum.

The following collections were consulted but yielded little on the present subject:

H.H.Asquith (first Earl of Oxford and Asquith) papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Henry Broadhurst papers, London School of Economics.

H. de F. Montgomery (Ulster Liberal Unionist landlord) papers, Public Record Office, Northern Ireland.

## B. AUTOBIOGRAPHIES, DIARIES, PRINTED CORRESPONDENCE, AND COLLECTED SPEECHES.


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